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THE “NEW WOMAN” ON THE STAGE:
THE MAKING OF A GENDERED PUBLIC SPHERE IN INTERWAR IRAN AND EGYPT

by

FAKHRI HAGHANI

Under the Direction of Donald M. Reid

ABSTRACT

During the interwar period in Iran and Egypt, local and regional manifestation of *tajadod/al-jidida* (modernity) as a “cultural identity crisis” created the nationalist image and practice of *zan-e emrouzi-e shahri/al-mar’a al-jidida al-madani* (the urban/secular “New Woman”). The dynamics of the process involved performance art, including the covert medium of journalism and the overt world of the performing arts of music, play, and cinema. The image of the “New Woman” as *asl/al-asala* (cultural authenticity) connected *sonnat/al-sunna* (tradition) with the global trends of modernism, linking pre-nineteenth century popular forms of performing arts to new genres, forms, and social experiences of the space of the performing arts.

The subversive transnational character of performance art operated across borders to promote both the discourse of modern womanhood in-the-making among intellectuals, and the public practice of women’s presence among the masses. However, the trans-border effects of

the medium were limited by local cultural and political ideologies of nationalism. The spectacle of women on the screen addressed national independence and the creation of a national film industry to resist the financial dominance of Europeans. In Iran, *zan-e emrouzi-e shahri* served the project of founding a modern nation-state, elevating of a culture of the city and urban development, and institutionalizing performing arts, mirroring the upholding of “male-guardianship.” In Egypt, in the absence of an authoritarian modern state and long-term experience of foreign occupations, *al-mar’a al-jidida al-madani* accompanied the traditional figure of *bint al-balad* (the countryside girl) to present modern advancements in film production with a traditional accent, to oppose European cultural values, to provide a tangible space for women’s multifaceted anti-colonial maneuvering, and to connect Egypt’s past history to its future.

Performance art helped women to convey their cultural nationalism and a sense of imagined identity by letting them see and be seen by each other, create interactions between the artist and the audience, and emphasize music as the heart of a society’s culture and art. A culture of body performance, a female visual public sphere, and a feminine (and feminist) interpretation of cultural authenticity in performance art led women to claim the profession as a legitimate career.

INDEX WORDS: Cinema, Cultural nationalism, Egypt, Feminism, Gender, Iran, Journalism, Middle East, Modernity, Music, Musical theatre, National identity, Nationalism, New woman, Performing arts, Regional identity, Theatre, Urban, Secular, Visual culture, Visual public sphere, Women.

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FAKHRI HAGHANI

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
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Georgia State University

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Georgia State University
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to women artists and performers of the 1920s and 30s in Iran and Egypt for their pioneering contributions to the social, economic, and cultural advancements of their societies and for the struggle that became part of their daily lives throughout their journey to keep alive their selves for a visionary and an imaginary future.

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passion and love for women's history in Egypt taught me a unique perspective. Debates, critical questions, and friendly conversations with Drs. Omnia al-Shukri and Mahmoud Ibrahim, and Ms. Carmen Khayr held over dinner at Don and Barbara Reid's apartment in Sharia Yehia Ibrahim were instrumental in stimulating my passion and interest in exploring both Egypt and the realization of this project. My special thanks go to Ms. Barbara Reid who offered me food for body and mind, from the first day of my arrival in Cairo to the end.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I have adopted a simplified version of Farsi and Arabic transliterations recommended by the Library of Congress. I have omitted diacritics except for *ayn* (‘) and *hamza* (‘). I have used common English norms for proper names of well-known figures and places such as Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, *tamashakhaneh*, Labiba Ahmed, al-Uzbakiyya. “Iran” and Cairo are used in place of “Persia” and “al-Qahira.” In accordance with the *Encyclopedia Iranica*, I have used (o) such as in *motreb* and Persian *izafa* (e) in *dokhtar-e Lor*. I followed the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* system for Arabic in using (u) for words such as *mutreb* and (i) in *sinima*. I have omitted Islamic *hijra* and Persian solar dates, using common era (B.C.E) and (C.E.) equivalents. Most quotations in Farsi and Arabic are my translations except those cited in a secondary source material as noted. If consistency and accuracy in transliteration have not been implemented on occasions, responsibility is all mine.

Introduction

Women's History in-the-Making

Among numerous studies in local social history, civil society, and public life and debates on the Middle East, the literature on the question of woman has attracted special interest in recent Western scholarship.¹ The topics of women's status in society and their place in public spaces of education, work, family, and art in particular have gained in popularity. Recent studies have given special attention to Iranian women's limited use of public spheres within the policies of seclusion and veiling enforced by the Islamic government of Iran.² However, they have rarely considered addressing the same questions within a regional comparative context.

In May 2005, while conducting my dissertation research in Egypt, I was invited by Dr. Nawal al-Sa'dawi to participate in the Seventh International Conference of the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA). The conference contained numerous presentations on women, covering topics from oppression, resistance and empowerment, solidarity, corporate globalism, history, human rights, and gendered dissent, to art, media, the female body, and male gaze. On the second night of the conference the participants were treated to a special cruise trip on the Nile, which included dinner, music, and performances. An interesting part of the night was the performance of belly dancing by a young Egyptian dancer who entertained cruise participants

¹. Nasrin Rahimieh, *Missing Persians: Discovering Voices in Iranian Cultural History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001); Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

². Parvin Aldalan, "Hijab be Ravayat-e Tarikh (Hijab in the Narrative of History)," *Jens-e Dowwom (The Second Sex)* 10 (2001); Haleh Esfandiari, *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran's Islamic Revolution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Homa Hoodfar, "The Veil in their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women," in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, eds. Lisa Low, Frederic Jameson and David Lloyd (London: Duke University Press, 1987); Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Haideh Moghissi, *Popularism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); Faegheh Shirazi, *The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); *Stories by Iranian Women Since the Revolution* trans. Soraya Paknazar Sullivan (Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the University of Texas at Austin, 1991).

while they were dining. Many women, in particular those who had come from the United States, were surprised and shocked that Dr. al-Sa'dawi would include such a performance in this conference. They asked questions such as, "Didn't we just talk about oppression and empowerment of women, in particular Arab women, over the last two days in the conference?" How could Dr. al-Sa'dawi talk about women's oppression in her books while allowing belly dancing, an oppressive task for women, to be part of the program?

A second interesting event took place last summer, during my recent visit to Iran. I was invited by Dr. Soheila Shahshahani to participate in a conference entitled "Kinship in Iran and Neighbouring Countries," which was co-sponsored by the French Institute of Research in Iran and the Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia. This conference also included presentations on diverse topics, ranging from kinship and marriages, family and social change, marriage and religious rites, and kinship and its future within the emigration condition, to representations and images of kinship, and the crisis of relationships between sexes and evolution of the institutions of marriage and family in the process of development of urban culture. Presenters were invited from all over the world. An interesting moment was when a female presenter from the United States on the podium let her *rousari* (hair scarf) slip down to her shoulder as she became engaged passionately in her talk. Iranian women in the audience were acutely conscious of the impact of such "faulty" behavior on the future of their public activities. They immediately intervened by giving signs to the Iranian male photographer, who with a total absence of attention was constantly shooting the podium, not to photograph her while she was not wearing her *hijab* (hair covering) properly. The photographer stopped shooting and the presenter also understood what was happening and slowly returned her scarf to her head.

These incidents clearly address distinctive elements embodied within the question of woman and the public sphere in contemporary Egypt and Iran. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the significance of historical roots and socio-political complexities accompanying the emergence of women's public sphere during the interwar period by comparing Iran and Egypt. What did the public sphere mean to women of the interwar period? Why was it important to women to have a public space (sphere)? What could the public sphere say about women's interactions in private and public, in the socio-political development of their societies as they engaged in the interwar period's debates about and practices of modernism? Can a comparative study of the history of public sphere and gender enhance knowledge about the present status of women in the Middle East? These are some of the primary questions which have motivated this study. These questions also attempt to debunk the myth that studies of women's history in the Middle East must deal exclusively with politics and religion, a trend which has recently gained popularity among scholars of the Middle East who are located in the United States and Western Europe, because of the recent political and religious discourses perpetuated by their governments' recent policies in the region.

Within "Western" historical scholarship on women, the study of "third world women" both as subject and as authorship is still underdeveloped.³ Lack of visibility and access to the archives on third world women's history is, of course, the primary reason for this. Furthermore, to borrow from Jacques Derrida, the very history of conception of the archives, in this case of third world women's history, involves *mal-d'archive* (archive fever), or "the *impression*, the unique moment of archivisation," which "produces as much as it records the event... it never

³. Despite the various post-colonial debates on the use of the term "third world women," I have preferred this term here as an alternative to the term "non-western" to refer to the universal aspects as well as the broader political context of women outside "Western" geopolitical locations. However, I have not capitalized this term in order to disassociate it from any theoretical designation.

neutrally consigns a preexistent archivable content in a simple manner.”⁴ It is therefore no surprise to see that the scholarship on Middle Eastern women remains theoretically intertwined with third world women’s history and subaltern studies⁵ as a “methodology of [the] oppressed.”⁶ Within this context, studying the way culture and attitudes are intertwined with the process of social and political ideological developments can free the scholarship on Middle Eastern women’s history from its current exclusively political and religious orientation.

Cultural history as a multidisciplinary field opens up spaces for a more versatile form of the study of women’s history not assumed to be merely subordinated to political and religious history. It permits questions about politics, religion, science, art, and literature to be examined through the perspective of cultural history. The study of culture brings together and gives “orientations” to studies of cultural practices, material culture, and critical paradigms. Mass media, popular culture, subculture, nationhood, and identity are a few among numerous areas which can find a place as the subject of studies of cultural history. Studies of culture also provide a forum for historians to engage a collaborative perspective across and between disciplinary, methodological, and theoretical boundaries. Visual culture, in particular, promotes such interdisciplinary work by providing a primary site for the production and contestation of meanings expressed through images, visual media, theories of spectatorship, and visual

⁴. Jacques Derrida, *Archives Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 110.

⁵. “Rewriting the history of colonial India from below, from the point of views of peasant insurgency” is a major point of departure for the Subaltern Studies collective of historians. The group has revitalized the term “subaltern” from the writings of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci to address “non-elite or subordinated social groups.” Based on the theory of the politicization of the colonized and contextualization of India within a capitalist mode of production rather than a semi-feudal system, the Subaltern Studies group focuses on a theory of change. More importantly, Subaltern Studies historians locate the agency of change in the “subaltern, or “insurgent.” See Donna Landry, and Gerald MacLean, eds., *Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (New York: Routledge, 1996). For writings by Subaltern Studies group see works authored by Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

⁶. Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

experience. Once considered as “high culture,” visual culture in recent scholarship has been redefined as quite indistinguishable from popular culture. “Feminism is one of the most important perspectives from which visual culture has been theorized and historicized over the past thirty years.” It has challenged “the notion of feminism as a unified discourse, assembling a wide array of writings that address art, film, architecture, popular culture, new media and other visual fields.... It explores how issues of race, class, nationality, and sexuality enter into debates about feminism in the field of the visual.”⁷

Penny Farfan has argued that performance art and its diverse forms of artistic and cultural activities are performative practices. Individuals associated with performance art are engaged in an act of materializing the performance of gender in the practice of everyday life. “Performance is always at once ‘a doing and a thing’ done, and ‘[t]o study performance is not to focus on completed forms, but to become aware of performance as itself a contested space’ in which ‘signifying (meaning-full) acts may enable new subject positions and new perspectives to emerge, even as the performative present contests the conventions and assumptions of oppressive cultural habits.’”⁸ During the interwar period in Iran and Egypt, on the one hand, performance art in its new genres, forms, and spatial settings/experiences was employed to create and elevate the image and practice of *zan-e emrouzi/al-mar’a al-jidida* (the “New Woman”), who perpetuated continuity and change through preservation of some aspects of pre-existing popular forms of performing arts.

In Iran, newly emerged adaptations of European plays and dramas incorporated perspectives derived from pre-nineteenth century popular forms of performance, despite the gap it

⁷. Amelia Jones (ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁸. Penny Farfan, *Women, Modernism, and Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

created between the artist and the audience. These perspectives included narratives of collective unity against foreign encroachment (the Arabs) conveyed through the story of Karbala⁹ in *ta'zieh*, and the ancient Zoroastrian belief in justice versus exploitation, in particular exploitation by landowners and governmental authorities, as in the epic stories of *Shahnameh*¹⁰ in *naqqali*. These earlier socio-political perspectives were used to address the question of Iranian women's oppression in society in general and in the family in particular, as women slowly began to appear on the stages of newly emerged theatre- and concert-halls. The first public musical concerts and the musical pieces which accompanied Western adaptation of plays included *tasnif*, a popular form of street poems opposite to classical *ghazal*. Pioneer women singers who appeared on the public stages of concert-halls sang those *tasnifha* on the stage and popularized them among masses on the streets. Many of these poets gained fame by the 1920s because of their contributions to the formation of national cultural ideology. Singing, as a career, became distinguished from composing, although a few poets like 'Aref Qazvini (1882-1934)¹¹ kept the tradition by appearing in public concerts as solo vocalists. It was during this time that nationalist sentiments among people emerged, laying the foundation for the establishment of a modern state by Reza Shah Pahlavi. The female stage pioneer, Qamar al-Molouk Vaziri, worked closely with these poets to

⁹. The incident of Karbala in Islamic *Shi'a* has been highlighted as a historic moment when the *Sunni* acted against *Shi'a* by killing the third Imam, Hussein son of Ali, and his army followers in a battle. The moment is especially poignant in religious chants because the story has it that during the last minutes of Imam Hussein's life in the battle, Omar refused to offer him and his companions water to drink, an extreme measure of cruelty against Islamic principles of human dignity. Omar's act has been considered by *Shi'a* followers as a sign of injustice and abuse of power.

¹⁰. *Shahnameh* (Book of the King) was an Iranian epic poem written by 'Abol-Qassem Ferdowsi in the sixth century C. E. Historians of *Shahnameh* have placed special emphasis on the humanist, nationalist, and religious contents of the book. The narrative tells the life stories of people who struggle to come to their own humanity in the face of victories and failures, bad actions and good deeds, love, pride, and belief in God's power and assistance for the creation of a just world.

¹¹. Abolqassem 'Aref Qazvini was a poet and music composer and the founder of public musical concerts in Iran, which also became popular through his contemporary Gholamhossein Darwish (known as Darwish Khan) (1872-1926). He became a pioneer in modern *tasnif sazi*.

popularize the notion of an *asl* (an authentic culture) by embedding nationalist ideas within these poems through her songs performed on the stages of numerous concert halls in Tehran and in many other cities. The pioneering role she played in elevating culture as a nationalist ideology, however, turned into a subversive act as she struggled to establish her personal and professional life as a woman, as an artist, and as a public figure on and off the stage.

In Egypt, the process of continuity and change in the performing arts was also connected with the complex nature of the historical transformation of the country. Performance art reflected and was a reflection of the trajectory between the ideology of aesthetics of an “authentic culture” and the socio-political development of the society. Stylistic elements of storytelling, improvisation, critical satire, and the musical teaching of *al-mashayikh*,¹² used in pre-nineteenth century Egyptian popular forms of performance such as *khayal al-zill*, *al-karaguz*, and *al-muhabbazin*, placed particular emphasis on the figure of the artist as the contact point between the masses and the ruling class as well as among people. Women vocalists in traditional male-oriented *takht*¹³ ensembles performed between plays in music halls and theaters, and popular use, by men and women singers, of the nineteenth century musical genre of *taqtuqa*¹⁴ performed originally by ‘*awalim* placed the question of gender at the forefront of the performing arts. As the agents of change and continuity,

¹². *Mashayikh* were pre-nineteenth century vocalists who were trained in *Sufi* tradition and participated in the musical rituals of the *dervishes*. See the paragraph on *mashayikh* in Chapter Three of this dissertation. *Sufism* is a mystical interpretation of Islam whose followers may be either *Sunni* or *Shi’a*, either organized in confraternities or not.

¹³. A Persian terminology, *takht* literally meant a platform, an elevated area on which the concert musicians sat, either with accompanying instrumentalists or a complete concert ensemble including the vocalist. The *takht* ensemble was usually identified with a leader who was either the sole singer or an instrumentalist. *Mutreb ‘ala takht* (singer with small *takht* ensemble) often played during the interval. See Amira Mitchell, *Women of Egypt, 1924-1931: Pioneers of Stardom and Fame* (London: British Library Sound Archive, 2006), 3; ‘Ali Jihad Racy, “Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1977), 52-4.

¹⁴. Short, strophic, light-themed songs in colloquial Arabic with a stanza based on slightly different *maqamat* (measure), equivalent to European’s “popular music” or “pop song” versus male repertoire of *dawr* and *muwashshah* which were leveled with the European “classical song’.” See Racy, “Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932,” 53.

women singers and performers of the 1920s and 30s, like Munira al-Mahdiyya, perpetuated the traditional role of creating interactions between artists and the audience. They incorporated a number of artistic elements of the pre-nineteenth century popular forms of performance in their plays and songs, including a language of blended classical and colloquial Egyptian Arabic, improvisation, and music as an essential part of the play, whether they were Egyptian or European adaptations. As the core of the formation of an “essential Egyptian” art and an authentic (*al-asala*) culture, women performers were able to create a sense of imagined identity for themselves as women and individual artists, as well as among the masses and the upper class community during such a critical time when the presence of Europeans in the country and their influence on Egyptian performing arts had made the process of nation-building and the rise of national sentiments tangible.

The emergence of cinema in the 1930s addressed the notion of “cultural identity crisis” within the context of nationalist aspirations. In Iran, on the physical level, in line with the establishment of different new forms of art schools, advertisements, and the press, and the development of *tamashakhaneha* (theatre-halls), the rise of cinema and film screenings was the ultimate reflection of the process of urbanization and institutionalization of performance, which marked the public presence of women both as audience and artists in the newly expanded public sphere of the cities. The improvement of cinema as a technique through the introduction of three laws in 1930, 1935, and 1939 institutionalized performance art. On the virtual level, the emergence of the first Iranian feature films during 1930s highlighted the ways the discourse of gender operated to address the question of urban expansion and city life versus the decadence of the rural. The first three Iranian feature films during the 1930s placed the earlier concept of *zan-e emrouzi* (the “New Woman”) within a new territory, the *shahri/madani* (urban/secular), addressing the question of

Iranian womanhood in-the-making. The appearance of the first Iranian women in film as leading actresses was accompanied by the representation of woman as an allegorical subject of a rising Iranian national film industry, serving the process of the foundation of a modern state by Reza Shah Pahlavi.

In Egypt, *al-mar'a al-jidida al-madani* mirrored the process of a secular form of urban development based on the presence and growth of European populations in the country. On the one hand, the image of an unattainable woman in cinema addressed the continuous struggle for the production of an Egyptian film industry against the competition and dominance of Western imports. This was ultimately a question of connecting the problem of the national film industry to the issue of the country's total independence from colonial dominance. The private enterprise of Tala't Harb highlighted the initial process of institutionalization of performance for a nationalist cause against foreign economic interventions. Institutionalization of performance was also achieved through elevation of city life and urban development by associating the spatial transformation of performing arts from street corners to cinema with the spectacle of the city and a culture of *al-jadida* which included the emergence of women in performing arts.

On the other hand, the appearance of a series of interactions between the countryside and the city, joined by the representation of the traditional Egyptian figure of *bint al-balad* (a girl from the countryside) conveyed the elevation of an urban life with an accent, preserving certain elements of Egyptian traditional popular forms of performance as an antithesis to European cultural values and connecting the past history of Egypt to its future. Discursive as well as practical representation of women in cinema as an embodiment of the idea of the financial and cultural independence of Egypt came at a time when the country was subject to the intense economic and socio-political aggression under British colonial interventions, mirroring controversies, identity crisis, and

dislocations. Symbolizing the nation as a woman, and revitalizing the spaces of performance with a feminist anti-colonial consciousness, aware of the cultural and artistic traditions of the land, Egyptian films were intended to celebrate the emergence of an Egyptian film industry. It was this inclusive imagery with a foundation of gender and nationalist personifications that women producers and actresses attempted to highlight as *al-mar'a al-jidida al-madani* (the urban/secular “New Woman”), a claim to the profession of performance art and a challenge to Egypt’s earlier prescriptions.

In general, women artists and journalists in Iran and Egypt operated through the development of a new culture of the visual public sphere to translate the period’s question of “gender crisis,” raised within performance art in association with culture, authenticity, and national identity, into a *shahri/madani* (urban/secular) context, sustaining their entrance to these professions and their right to citizenship and their collective subjects. Diverse forms of public artistic and cultural activities by women during the interwar period in Iran and Egypt marked the emergence of a female visual public sphere working within and against the hegemonic public sphere constituted by the male modernists. For example, the women’s press both in Iran and Egypt appeared with changed contents (editorial, letters to editors, and art pages) and styles (the addition of illustrations and advertisements). Enhancing the text with visuals, the Iranian women’s press, as a medium of the public sphere, introduced theatrical narratives, used the framework of an advertisement, and included photography. Articles emphasized many aspects of the weaknesses and oppression of women in Iran but at the same time elevated numerous achievements of women both in the West and the in the East and highlighted in particular the area of women’s non-traditional public work. Many articles acknowledged other Iranian women journalists, which was an act of strengthening the visibility of Iranian women both to themselves and to readers. In Egypt,

the women's press with its many illustrations and a variety of textual topics from entertainment to politics and culture advocated self-assertion, self-thought, and self-responsibility. Individual advancement incorporating a private and public whole was highlighted. News about the lives and activities of women journalists, political activists and artists and actresses were numerous. Art journals like *Ruz al-Yusuf* and *al-Mihrajan* wrote and illustrated news about the opening of theatres, playhouses, and women's *salas*. Self-guides on women's physical health and sport appeared for the first time with illustrations.

In Egypt, the discourse of gender, both as a subject and as a social practice took on major significance also with the rise of the public sphere of cinema as a medium of continuity and change in terms of both spatial transformation of performance from corner streets to theatre-halls and cinema and the notion of moving from personal identity to a broader space of national identity for women. While the construction of a female visual public sphere was a continuous path in women's use of the public sphere for political nationalist collectivity at the turn of the century, the emergence of multiple kinds of individual lives and multi-layered politics of gendered identities distinguished the interwar period from the earlier one. In both Iran and Egypt, feminism¹⁵ was no longer perceived merely as a direct activity of political nationalist movements; instead it was created as a collective project among women, elaborated through many cultural and political channels.

Extending Farfan's argument about French female performers at the turn of the century to the context of interwar Iran and Egypt, in order to examine diverse positions within feminism, the notion of feminist modernism, and different objectives and strategies as well as possibilities

¹⁵. Although the term "feminism" has been used cautiously in the context of the question of woman within countries of the Middle East, today as well as in the early twentieth century, I believe it is appropriate to use the term because of the political and cultural nature and mission of the activities which women were doing in the region.

and limitations of feminist performance practice in the modernist contest, we need to understand the important role that unified concepts of sex and gender played for Iranian and Egyptian women performers. Public performances of women, defined within gendered modern artistic or/and performative contexts, were also associated with the public emergence of a culture of body performance, pertaining to psychological and physical embodiment of the self as an artist – writer, singer, actor – (and as a new woman) and the need to fulfill that desire, despite the prevalence of a prescriptive gendered ideology. In other words, gendered subjects were able to use visual public spheres of performance, including pages of the press, stages of music- and theatre-halls, and cinema screens shaped by the making and refashioning of modern cities as the site of meaning-making, inscriptions, modern citizen-making, emancipation, and constraints/regulations defined by individual or/and state forces, to negotiate their everyday actions, including their personal lives and professional works embodied with political, national, and individual possibilities/boundaries.

As I pursue the connection between the question of women's public sphere and the emergence of women's public artistic and cultural performances in interwar Iran and Egypt in this dissertation, I argue that local translations and writings of the story of the development of "modernity" in interwar Iran and Egypt, as a historical space and a conceptual frame concerned with the construction of identities, need to be examined within a pluralistic and shifting context. "Modernity" in Iran and Egypt was formulated around the concepts of nation building, secular education, and cultural authenticity around the turn of the century. Nineteenth century European construction of the separation of private and public spheres has further problematized the question of women's "emancipation," citizenship, and equal rights, major components defining "modernity" and gender. In the Middle East, the project of internal reforms or "modernity"

during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was intertwined with assertion of an anti-imperialist national identity and dismantling of pre-capitalist structures of monarchy for political independence. Like many countries in Asia and Africa, leftist or nationalist ideologies were the key to the emergence of resistance movements in the Middle East. Both groups confronted major challenges in dealing with the paradoxical strategy of adopting Western models while reviving a distant independent past, or religious practices. Secular education and the spread of literacy as significant aspects of “modernity” marked the core of such anti-imperial resistance ideologies. Within this context of resistance, struggles for women’s emancipation and a new dimension of the role and status of women within family and society took form. Defining “enlightened” women as “marks of modernity,” male reformists and intellectuals in the Middle East called for secular education and freedom of movement for women, and monogamy.¹⁶

Images of the “New Woman,” both as symbols of change and carriers of tradition or “modernity” were central to the specific construction of national identity in each country. Despite nationalists’ failure to deliver “modernity’s” progressive claim to emancipation of women, “the power of the rhetoric of the new” was strong among women. The modernizing ethos of the

¹⁶. Kumari, Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1986). To define “modernity” as a historically constructed term, we need first to look at the recent criticisms raised by the scholars of sociological and cultural studies to the concept of “modernity” as suggestive of racial biases when it is viewed within the context of the European language of the Enlightenment and progress, social theories of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, and economic theories of development and modernization. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault also extended his critique of capitalist modernity to the realms of family and gender. See Leila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking of Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). Leila Ahmed and Marnia Larzeg have pointed out the problem with setting a “Western” model of “modernity” for Middle Eastern women. It is, however, from the perspective of the theories of postcolonial analysis, which I intend to examine the definition(s) of “modernity” as a multi-sited current and a two- or most often multi-way process, refusing to perceive “modernity” as the product of binary opposition between “East” and the “West.” See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1994). Although outside the limits of this project, scholarly accounts of a few other case studies can help us grasp the importance of such theoretical implication that the Imperial contexts were written and read through colonial encounters between the metropole and the colonies. See Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995); Edward Sai’d, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

interwar period held out the possibility for women to make their own lives distinct from nationalist projects, while still relating to the specific developmental processes of each country.

In Iran, indirect foreign influences and the rise of Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925 as the leader of the country interrupted the original public political activities of women during the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11, such as reading in public radical slogans about the freedom gained for women through the Constitution while unveiling themselves on the streets, and establishing organizations which placed bans on the use of cosmetics and manufacturing dresses from foreign fabrics as primary conditions for their memberships.¹⁷ The formation of an Iranian state by Reza Shah during the interwar period redirected women's political activities of the Constitutional period towards cultural and social modernization projects. For example, *Jami'at Neswan-e Watankhah Iran* (The Patriotic Women's League of Iran), founded in 1922, initially incorporated many radical operations in its agenda because of its membership's demography, consisting of wives and daughters of male members of the Social Democratic Party and recent female graduates who would give passionate speeches about women's consciousness about their civil and political rights during the league's weekly gatherings. One of the most radical works that Ms. Eskandari and other members of the League performed was to burn several copies of a pamphlet entitled *Makr-e Zanan* (Women's Wiles) in *Meydan-e Toupkhaneh*, a crowded popular square in Tehran. After her arrest, she gave an emotional speech in defense of women in the police station, which may have contributed to her release. Operations of *Jami'at* changed once the government interfered with setting its policies and directions. *Jami'at Neswan* became the first Iranian women's organization involved in coordinating the events for the first Women's International Congress, which was held in Iran in 1932. Members of *Jami'at*

¹⁷. Badr ol-Molouk Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light: Women's Emancipation in Iran*, trans. F. R. C. Bagley (New York: Exposition Press, 1977).

were not given authority to organize the conference but were asked to work under the guidance of Mr. Orang who was appointed by the government to coordinate the program of the Congress of Women of the East where Nur Hamada (from Beirut), Hanina Khuri (from Egypt), and Syyyeda Fatema (from Iraq) participated. *Jami'at Neswan* was ultimately replaced with *Kanoon Banovan-e Iran* (The Ladies Center of Iran). The latter attempted to engage women, in particular women teachers, in the project of the state to eliminate seclusion and veiling and to direct women's efforts toward programs of social services and bring them into civic life.¹⁸

Women activists, like Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, who concentrated on journalism, establishing girls' schools and women's organizations, and involvement with international feminist organizations, were exceptions. While studying in France, Dowlatabadi's impressive articles appeared in newspapers and became the center of numerous debates. She wrote about the issues of Iranian women's independence in regard to family inheritance and advantages in rights Muslim women had compared to European ones. In 1926, she made an influential speech at the International Congress of Women in Paris. Her female gaze on women of the "West" was an attempt to carry on the "conversation among cultures and civilizations," a door initially opened by women political activists during the Constitutional Revolution when they sent a telegraph to British suffragists demanding their assistance against a Russian ultimatum to the

¹⁸. *Jami'at Neswan-e Watankhah Iran* (The Patriotic Women's League of Iran) was founded by Mohtaram Eskandari and included many political and cultural operations within its projects, such as organizing cooperative societies as a means of developing national industries, setting up hospitals for poor women, and financial and material assistance to the country's defenders during the World War I. Ms. Eskandari's father was a militant activist who had founded the *Adamiyat* (Humanitarian) *Society* a few years before the Constitutional Revolution. *Jami'at's* leading members were Mastureh Afshah, Nur al-Hoda Manganeh, Fakhr-e Afaq Parsa, Nosrat Moshiri, Fakhr-e Ozma Arghun (Adel), Homa Mahmudi, and Safiyeh Eskandari. See Ibid; Mohamad Hossein Khosrawpanah, *Hadafla wa Mobarezeh Zan-e Irani: Az Enqelab-e Mashrouteh ta Saltanat-e Pahlavi (The Goals and the Struggle of Iranian Woman: From Constitutional Revolution to the Kingdom of Pahlavi)* (Tehran: Payam-e Emruz, 2003).

Iranian government.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Egypt won partial independence from the British in 1922. Two years later, the nationalist Wafd Party leader and the Prime Minister of Egypt Sa'd Zaghlul, came to power in 1924. He failed to keep the promises implied to women during the liberation struggle of 1919, such as elimination of gender inequalities. Leading Egyptian women, like Hoda Sha'rawi, Saiza Nabarawai, Doria Shafiq, May Ziada, and Nabawia Musa, decided to organize to advance an explicitly feminist agenda. For Egyptian women, the 1920s and 30s were major turning points both in the creation of the first feminist organization, The Egyptian Feminist Union, and in their overseas feminist activities with organizations such as the International Women Suffrage Alliance (IWSA).²⁰

In both Iran and Egypt, the feminist modernist public sphere of the 1920s and 30s was not limited to explicit political dissent but extended to “a renewed commitment to situate bodily experience in a wider classed and ethnic social context.”²¹ This female display of transformed identity was acted out as “female protagonists’ compliance with, rather than their departure from,” the hegemonic cultural scripts of their specific societies, which denied women status as authoritative subjects. The role that women’s visual public sphere of performance art, as a transitional space between women’s traditional private and men’s public spheres, played in the construction of an “imaginary global modernity” during the interwar period led women to refute the earlier formulation of “modernity” as merely masculine and political. The visual public sphere of performance art as a “cultural communication system” circulating in the region and

¹⁹. Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light: Women’s Emancipation in Iran*.

²⁰. Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²¹. Gen Doy, *Women and Visual Culture in Nineteenth Century France, 1800-1852* (New York: Leicester University Press, 1988), chpt. 4.

between the region and the world created an international trajectory of collective identity through which “modernity” was translated as *tajaddod* (in Persian) and *al-jidida* (in Arabic) defined by the concept of *zan-e emrouzi/al-mar’a al-jidida* the “New Woman” and the making of what Najmabadi has called *zanniat-e modern* (the modern womanhood) in Iran and Egypt.²²

Iran and Egypt, two major significant centers in the Middle East, have always played larger cultural roles beyond their territorial borders. Certain similar but also different and sometimes interactive developmental processes emerge when these countries are viewed through a comparative spectrum. Geographically, both countries at one point or another were considered as separate from Arab territories, Egypt for her proximity to Africa and Iran for her affinity with Central Asia. Both countries had also enjoyed a long and prosperous period of pre-Islamic ancient histories of culture and politics. When Islam traveled from one society to another after its emergence in seventh century C. E., it imported a dominant Arabic language and life-style to Egypt. Iran, however, continued to adopt variations of ancient Persian language and culture, of course transformed under the influences of the Arab-Islamic world. Agriculture remained vital to the development of Egyptian economy up to the present time, whereas the growth of oil and its manufacturing products and factories in the twentieth century turned Iran into a semi-industrial society. *Sunni* Islam became dominant in Egypt while people in Iran turned *Shi’a* Islam into their official religion. From 1798-1801 and 1882-1956, Egypt was subject to aggression and occupation by French and then British colonial powers, passing some parts of that legacy to the United States in the later twentieth century, while Iran remained a semi-colonial country struggling to end the manipulative and competitive interference of French,

²². Mahdokht Sana’i and Afsaneh Najmabadi, eds., *Sediqeh Dowlatabadi: Nameha, Neweshteha, wa Yadha* (*Sediqeh Dowlatabadi: Letters, Writings, and Memories*), vol. 3 (Chicago: Negaresh wa Negaresh-e Zan, 1998).

British, Russian, and later the United States' imperialism in the country's economic and political affairs.

The intellectual collaboration between Seyyed Jamal al-Din Assadabadi (al-Afghani), who was of Iranian origin, and Egyptian reformer Muhammad Abduh, in the late nineteenth century, on the questions of modernity, Islam, and social change shows interaction between Iran and Egypt as well as partially parallel development. Meanwhile, discourse on the status of women, veiling, and girls' education formulated by Rifa' Rafi al-Tahtawi, Muhammad Abduh, and Qasim Amin reached a wide segment of the populations in the region. The three Iranian nationalist figures at the turn of the century, Kirmani, Ashtiani, and Talibof, were influenced by Amin when they argued for women's education as the "science of home management." In 1900, Ashtiani selectively translated some chapters of Amin's book, *The Liberation of Women*, eliminating the chapter on "Women and the Veil" as well as changing the final paragraph of the introductory chapter. In it, he replaced Amin's phrase – the use of the veil terminated – with that of "due regard to condition of *hijab*."²³

During the 1920s and 30s, Iran witnessed a project of capitalist development and state centralization carried out by an imposed regime, whereas the projects of reform and nation building in Egypt were set within a framework of an existent class structure and monarchical systems. Political, geographic, economic, and social similarities and differences that marked the historical development of Iran and Egypt were strengthened during the interwar period as a number of events contributed further to create interactions between the two countries. I began my research in Iran and Egypt with such premises and I was able to document intriguing links between the two countries, in my primary source materials.

²³. Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran," in *Remaking of Women*, ed. Abu-Lughod, 101.

Cross cultural fertilization such as this shows that there was much intellectual fluidity in the region, despite the arbitrary post World War I delineation of physical national boundaries. Examples specific to the question of woman included the news about participation of women in conferences taking place in the Middle East,²⁴ and an invitation by the “Voice of Egypt,” Umm Kulthum forwarded to the Iranian female celebrity, Qamar al-Molouk Vaziri to sing in a public concert in Cairo.²⁵ In 1938 the *Vali’ahd* (the Prince) of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, married the eldest daughter of Egypt’s late King Fuad, also the sister of King Faruq, Princess Fawzia. Initially, I doubted I would find much about this event in women’s periodicals of the time, but I found pages and pages of both visual and narrative references to this marriage in several women’s journals in both countries.²⁶ Articles about the Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi, and the political and social changes in Iran during the 1920s and 30s under his government were also included in Egyptian journals.²⁷ The most intriguing document that I found was printed in *L’Egyptienne*, the journal of the Egyptian Feminist Union.²⁸ The article is a report by Saiza Nabrawi, the editor of the journal, about the speech by Ms. Dowlatabadi, an Iranian woman who was pursuing her education in Paris and advocating the case of women in the East. My most recent discovery came through a source which I found in the Rare Book Special Collection at the

²⁴ . Two examples of such conferences, which took place in the Middle East in the 1930s, were The Congress of Eastern Women in Tehran in 1938 and the conference held by the Association of Egyptian Feminist Union in 1938 in Cairo on Eastern women entitled “Arab Women and the Question of Palestine.” See Badran, *Feminist, Islam and Nation*; Gholamreza Salami & Afsaneh Najmabadi, eds., *Nehzat Neswan-e Sharq (Women’s Awakening Movement of the East)* (Tehran: Nashr wa Pajouhesh Shirazeh, 2005).

²⁵ . Zohreh Khaleqi, *Away-e Mehrbani (the Sound of Kindness)* (Tehran: Donyay-e Madar, 2000).

²⁶ . In Iran, *Jami’at Neswan-e Watankhah* 24 (1938): 5; In Egypt, *al-Nahda al-Nisa’iyya*, 16 (January 1938): np; *Ibid.*, 16 (June 1938): np; *al-Mihrajan*, 1 (1 June 1938): np; *al-Fatat*, 2 (9 March 1939): 5; *Ibid.*, 2 (16 March 1939): np.

²⁷ . *al-Sayyidat wa al-Rijal*, 8 (28 February 1927): 271-2; *al-Mihrajan*, 1 (15 June 1938): 17; *Ibid.*, 1 (September 1938): 41-3; *al-Fatat*, 2 (6 April 1939): 13; *Ibid.*, 2 (13 April 1939): 30.

²⁸ . *L’Egyptienne*, 10 (October 1927): 24-9.

American University in Cairo Library. The Egyptian Feminist Union had published a report about the Conference of Eastern Women entitled “Arab Women and the Question of Palestine” which was held at the headquarters of the Association of the Egyptian Feminist Union from 15 to 18 October 1938. An Iranian representative attended this conference and presented a public speech on the first day.²⁹

Besides attesting to the two countries’ historical linkage, I find this reference to Iran and Egypt, and in particular to Iranian and Egyptian women, as a vital key to the comparative purpose of my work. It illustrates the significance of the concept of “seeing” and “watching,” both in visual and narrative ways in the regional context. The appearance of textual and visual news about the Royal Wedding acted as a reference to economic and military strength for both communities in the ancient and medieval tradition of tribal marriages in the Middle East. However, the report also created a cultural opening space (both visual and textual) for the Egyptian women’s press to produce a plethora of articles about Iran’s culture and society, as well as Iranian women’s advancement and struggle to gain their political and social rights. This overrode the ideas of a *Sunni – Shi’a* and an Arab – *Ajam* (non Arab) divide.

At such a critical anti-colonial stage in the struggling life of both countries, the Royal union between an Arab and an *Ajam* country was viewed as a symbol of regional inclusiveness with a hint of a nationalist sentiment. For example, *al-Fatat* published a lead column in its 1939 *al-mutafariqat* section entitled “the union between Egypt and Iran.” In it, the writer praised “the fortunate occasion where the establishment of the union of the communities through the marriage relationship between Iran and Egypt secures the greatness of their nations.” The writer

²⁹ . *Kitab al-Mar’a al-Arabia wa Qadiyya Filistin (The Book of the Arab Women and the Subject of Palestine)* (The Conference of Eastern Women Held at the House of the Association of the Egyptian Feminist Union, 15 – 18 October 1938: The Modern Publisher of the Egypt).

emphasized “the success and wellness of those nations because the prophet, peace be upon him, in his political relationship between Arab tribes supported marriage as the vehicle for union and power.”³⁰ My day-to-day conversation with Egyptian cab drivers about life in Iran and Egypt also told me that cultural and social exchanges between Iran and Egypt still suggest today a political and interactional solidarity and union between the two countries at the popular level. Phrases such as “Iran and Egypt must unite” may well address the need for reexamination of a similar contested space to that of the 1920s and 30s, when cultural debates and dialogues about the other country in the areas of social concerns in general, and women and public space in particular, both reflected and were influenced by each country’s flourishing images as well as the presence of political and cultural advances.

In expanding the history of “capitalist modernity” beyond its traditional Western paradigm, Timothy Mitchell has called for viewing modernity as a “worldwide phenomenon” with “less Eurocentric ways of acknowledging the importance and variation of non-European developments.”³¹ One way to adopt a less Eurocentric view of non-European modernity would be to produce academic works with regional studies perspectives. Walter Armbrust has connected the increasing institutional investments of the United State’s academia in transnational studies during 1990s to the United States’ government’s interest in global commercial and political interactions. For Armbrust, the two decades of 1980s and 90s anti-area studies rhetoric represented the prominent concern of academia with making connections between power and the production of knowledge. The relative success in the U.S. Middle East policy during those decades in reality wiped out the cold-war era’s growth in the production of area studies scholarly

³⁰ . *al-Fatat*, 2 (2 March 1939): 13.

³¹ . Timothy Mitchell, ed., *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xii.

works on the Middle East within the United State's academies. It was the "politics of *presence* and *absence* at the institutional level" that marked the "politics of the nation-state."³²

The use of Armbrust's methodological theory about the absence of scholarly works on the Middle East in United States' academia seems past due in 2008, when the Middle East has become an object of continuous obsession for the economic and political success and failure of the U.S. at home and abroad. Ironically, Armbrust could have probably not wished for better both for the increase in the United States' economic and political interest in the region as well as for the unprecedented rise in academic literary productions on the variety of topics about the Middle East. However, the point that was embedded in Armbrust's pro area studies argument, which is still properly valid in 2008, has been the notion of the contribution of area studies or the nation-state concentration to transnational scholarship. As many scholars have argued, the rise of a global system of economic, cultural, and political exchanges on a transregional level long preceded the early twenty first century.³³ Most of these studies have used nation-states as the point of departure for understanding transnational discourse. The comparative method used in this dissertation explores the role that the visual public sphere of performance art as a "cultural communication system" played in the construction of a modernity (*asil-e novin/al-asala al-jidida*) which circulated in the region and between regional and global. This process created an imaginary global trajectory of collective identity defined by and for *zan-e emrouzi/al-mar'a al-jidida* (the "New woman") in Egypt and Iran. This dissertation intends to follow and expand the

³² . Walter Armbrust, ed., *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3.

³³ . Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

theoretical notion of exploring transnational themes through focusing on regional work undertaken previously in various disciplines.

Methodology and Sources

As a humanist discipline with a multi-method approach, qualitative research incorporates a “wide range of interconnected methods” which do not belong to a single discipline.

“Interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary,” qualitative research deploys the study and “collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives.”³⁴ I have drawn on the disciplines of history, anthropology, and cultural, gender, and media studies as multiple sites of qualitative research analysis to explore threads that constructed the gendered identity politics of “modernity” in Egypt and Iran during the interwar period. Keeping a gender studies approach central throughout, I employed the following two methods for this project: 1) a content analysis based on published documents, unpublished manuscripts, songs, films, and photographs consulted in the libraries, archives, and private collections in Iran and Egypt, and 2) an ethnographic approach which consisted of visiting places and conducting semi-structured interviews. For each method I tried to use as multi-sited a research approach as possible to trace the different settings of things, people, and stories.

My content analysis method and archival research included cultural artifacts, sets of objects revealing aspects of human life ranging from private worlds to popular culture, technology, and social organizations. These cultural artifacts are divided into three categories: newspapers and women’s journals, other “soft” narrative and visual texts, and material culture.

³⁴ . Norman K. Denzinger and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (London: Sage Publication, 2000), 2.

Source materials from these three categories included essays, speeches, pamphlets, journal articles, newspaper reports, correspondence, poetry, diaries, autobiographies, photographs, plays, films, ads, music, recording discs, and technology. Acting as what John and Jean Comaroff have called an “ethnographer of the archive,”³⁵ I sought to explore the semantic space of the 1920s and 30s Iranian and Egyptian cultures where individuals, societies, and histories were constructed. I have focused on the ways fragmentary discourses were developed into ideologies and the role that inscriptions of various kinds played in the making of those arguments, ideologies, and often “realities” of the gendered identity politics of the 1920s and 30s. I excavated the “different” voices and the processes that gave life to the production of those particular archival texts and visuals as I proceeded to begin constructing my own archival sources for this historical ethnographic project. It is the ethnographic narrative of “history-in-making” that I took from this discipline. My ethnographic readings of archives included not only a comparative analysis of each society’s cultural, political, ideological, and discursive voices but also interactive components of these arguments and interweaving processes. To give substance to this collective stand and its different voices I moved across Egypt and Iran, turning this multisided research project into a multi-archival one.

My second method was “doing field work.” As feminist anthropological method, ethnography makes “women’s lives visible,” similar to the way that interviewing makes “women’s voices audible.” “[F]eminist fieldwork has a special role in upholding a nonpositivist perspective, rebuilding the social sciences and producing new concepts concerning women.”³⁶ Notwithstanding the postmodern claim that historical “narrative” has distorted the

³⁵ John and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

³⁶ . Ibid., 46.

“reality” or “truth” through “interpretation” and “representation,” the use of oral history “adds women’s voices” to the writing of women’s history, and “clothes the ‘political’ narrative with its personal context.” To transform “private memory into public history” scholars of women’s history need to “become detectives, explorers, and archeologists, piecing together multiple shards of oral and written memories and documents” and produce a history that “resembles reconstructed pottery assembled of small holes contiguous with richly painted shards.”³⁷ For this purpose, I carried out semi-structured interviews with a few women and men, choosing a wide range of people with regard to age, class, and ethnic and religious backgrounds, both for their past memories as well as their present recollections.

In Iran, I interviewed the famous poet, Simin Behbahani, about the significance of the interwar period in the life of women as she recalled memories of her mother, Fakhrozma Arghun, poet, social activist, speaker, and translator and one of the founding members of *Jami’at Neswan-e Watankhah* in 1920s. Shahla Lahiji, the founder of the women’s publishing house, *Entesharat-e Roshangaran wa Motale’at-e Zanan* also shared her thoughts with me about what it could have meant to be a journalist at the turn of the century in Iran. Ms. Mansoureh Shoja’i, at Sediqeh Dowlat Abadi Women’s Library shared her published articles written on Qamar al-Molouk Vaziri with me and facilitated my access to two DVDs produced on the life and memory of this forgotten celebrity. These disks contained talks, as well as reflections, by a number of contemporary Iranian women artists and writers on Qamar and her social and artistic contribution. Mr. Mohammad Tahami Nejad was influential in leading me to the appropriate sources of information on the first talkie film directed by an Iranian expatriate. He shared with

³⁷ . Ellen L. Fleischmann, *The Nation and its “New” Women: The Palestinian Women’s Movement, 1920 – 1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 20, 23.

me his insights and a film trailer about the emergence of the first Iranian women in cinema during the 1930s.

In Egypt, during my interview with Dr. Hoda Elsadda, the founder of the Women's Memory Forum Institute, I was told about the pioneering role of Galila Tamarhan in journalism, as she became the first publisher and editor of a medical journal in 1865 in Egypt, a fact quite unknown to many scholars of the field. Dr. Elsadda facilitated my access to the library of the Forum, which was instrumental in my research. Ms. Marianne Khoury at *Misr* International Films made available to me the movies relevant to the artistic and personal lives of many Egyptian actresses and performers during the 1920s and 30s and I watched those movies in her office. The follow-up interview with Ms. Khoury was extremely informative as she talked about the complexities involved in the step-by-step process of exploring primary source documents, places, and people, which ultimately led her to weaving together the stories told in the movies. My several sittings with Heba Farid in her beautiful apartment decorated with her grandmother's furniture gave us a chance to talk about the 1920s celebrity Na'ima al-Misriyya, Heba's grandmother, as well as the lack of scholarly works on women in performance in the region. It was so refreshing to find out that Heba had initiated the Na'ima Project, a multi-dimensional and multi-purpose web-based project intending not only to explore artistic talents and works of Na'ima al-Misriyya but also to provide a space for exploration and elevation of the works of other significant performers of the time in the region.

As I moved from archival research to the fieldwork, I followed Marcus's formulation of "complicity and the multi-sited spaces of contemporary ethnography," carrying a sense of being "here and there," highlighting the markers of "outsideness."³⁸ The fieldwork in this project

³⁸ . George E. Marcus, *Ethnography through Thick and Thin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

makes “*present*” that “*elsewhere*,” the history of the encounter between women and the public sphere through performance art and the formation of a gendered identity politics of the interwar period in Egypt and Iran. In Marcus’s words the fieldwork relationships in terms of complicity is not the ability to probe the “inside” of a culture, but rather the recognition that “the fragments of local discourses have their origins elsewhere without the relationship to that elsewhere being clear.”³⁹ Moreover, the fieldwork in this project assisted me to unpack the Eurocentric definition of “modernity,” because as Marcus has pointed out “the local knowledge is never only about being local. Ethnographic research is the cultural formation, produced in several different locales” making global the outcome of local.⁴⁰ To explore threads that constructed the gendered identity politics of “modernity” in Egypt and Iran during the interwar period, I drew on my educational expertise in the disciplines of history, anthropology, and gender studies, creating a multi-sited/multidisciplinary network of analysis for this project. Acting both as a historian and an ethnographer, I incorporated the result of my own visits to places in Egypt and Iran within a third site, bringing together the archival documents, the ethnographic materials, and my own local-global perspectives to an interactional multi-sited “imaginary research.” This open-ended setting, where the transnational phenomenon is discussed through national categories, allowed the analysis to be produced in several different locales, and global could be seen as an outcome of local rather than as a product of macro-micro tension.

³⁹ . Ibid., 119.

⁴⁰ . Ibid., 83.

Locations

In Egypt, cultural artifacts needed for my content analysis method were mainly located in the *dawriyyat* (the periodical section) of *Dar al-Kutub* (the Egyptian National Library), the Special Collection of the Rare Books Library (American University in Cairo), CEDEJ (Centre d'Etudes et de Documentation Economique, Juridique et Sociale), the Association of Hoda Sha'rawi's Egyptian Feminist Union (a private collection), Women and the Memory Forum Institute (a private collection), and the periodicals and monographs sections of the American University in Cairo Library. I have examined eleven periodicals at *Dar al Kutub* based on their available holdings, dated from 1919 to 1940. At the Women and the Memory Forum Institute, I used one journal and a number of monographs including primary sources in Arabic. The collection at Hoda Sha'rawi's Association Library included several biographical monographs on women involved with EFU and photocopies of articles published in newspapers and journals about the activities of EFU during and after the 1920s and 30s. The staff at the center let me visit the different sections of the center and their operations, such as the nursery, clinic, girls' hostel, and handcrafts lab.

CEDEJ provided me with issues of *L'Egyptienne*, the official journal of EFU in French. The holdings included 1925 through 1938. I found two boxes at the Special Collection of the AUC Library containing communications (official and private as well as national and international), hand and typed copies of speeches, and notes belonging to Hoda Sha'rawi and the EFU Association. I also looked at some visual resource collections there. I looked at five journals in the periodicals section of the AUC General Library and a number of monographs as secondary sources related to my research. I also visited a number of bookstores and benefited in particular from consultation with a bookseller in *Aataba* Square who provided me with copies of

several monographs on my subject written in Arabic, both primary and secondary sources.

Marian Khoury at *Misr* International Film invited me to watch six documentary movies on Egyptian women artists and writers living during the 1920s and 30s. My visit to *Dar al-Kutub* and Hoda Sha'rawi's center and its adjacent theatre was full of anecdotal nuances, in particular the way making photocopies from source materials or using a digital camera to take photographs are considered taboo. However, I was able to obtain what I requested thanks to the staff and administrations despite several bureaucratic obstacles and challenges.

In Iran, I visited the following places to use their public and/or private collections: The *majallat* (the periodical) section of the Central Library of the University of Tehran, *Markaz Asnad-e Melli* (the National Archives), the periodicals and monographs sections of the *Ketabkhaneh Melli Iran* (the National Library of Iran), *Khaneh Cinema* (the House of Cinema), the Library of *Markaz Farhangi Zanan* (the Women's Cultural Center), *Markaz Motale'at Tarikhi-e Mo'aser* (the Institute for the Studies of the Iranian Contemporary History), *Ketabkhaneh Markaz Omour Moshakerat-e Zanan* (the Library of the Office of Women's Cultural Participation affiliated with the President's Office), and the Library of *Majlis* (the Parliament). At the *majallat* (the periodical) section of the Central Library of the University of Tehran, I found eight periodicals dated from 1921 to 1938 relevant to my topic. Governmental and official documents, which I obtained from the Office of National Archives, have been selected primarily for their degree of significance to my work. I also purchased a few monographs published by the National Archives, which are collections of the primary source materials located in that organization relevant to my topic. I looked at ten journals and seven monographs located in the National Library of Iran.

Khaneh Cinema (the House of Cinema) provided me with secondary monographs pertaining to the appearance of the first women in Iranian Films. In addition to networking and conversations with women activists and scholars at *Markaz Farhangi Zanan* (Women's Cultural Center) and the Center for Women's Cultural Participation, I was able to have access to a number of monographs and periodicals on Iranian women's history and culture there. The Institute for the Studies of Contemporary History of Iran had published the book *Kanoon Banovan* (The Ladies' Center), which is the Institute's archival collection of all the official and non-official documents about the foundation and the activities of this center during the 1930s. I found seven more periodicals at the Library of *Majlis* (the Parliament) and a couple of secondary source materials relevant to my subject. As in Cairo, I visited a number of bookshops in Tehran and used their assistance in locating rare books and audio-visual materials. *Entesharate Roshangaran wa Motale'at-e Zanan* (Roshangaran and Women's Studies Publishing) is a women's publishing house which has produced many scholarly monographs on and by women. Networking with the scholars in the fields of Iranian History and Women's Studies, whom I met at this cultural center, was invaluable as their guidance made my research path more feasible.

Outline of the Chapters

Chapter one is divided into four sections. It has incorporated a body of literature review according to the following sections: a) visual public sphere and cultural identity b) the "New Woman," modernity, and gendered visual public sphere, c) performance, performance art, and feminist public sphere, and d) performance, performance arts, and the gendered visual public sphere in Iran and Egypt. The literature covered in this chapter pertains to the major part of the Western scholarship on the relevant topics. Non-Western scholarly works are excluded. The theoretical formulations explored in these works, which include the visual public sphere, the

significance of performance art in studies of women's history, and the emergence of the concept of the "New Woman," both in art and within the society have helped me to construct the framework of my main arguments, which are discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter two begins articulating my dissertation topic. The women's press and the role it played in associating the emergence of women in performance art with visual culture are discussed in this chapter. The chapter addresses women's journalism, similar to performing arts, as a performative act of placing one's self in public in order for other women to see and extend that visual experience to their own selves. Egyptian journals used for this purpose have included many articles, columns, and illustrations about women in the performing arts, whereas Iranian journals I was able to have access to were less visual, incorporating more textual materials on women's achievements in the areas outside the performing arts. The common thread found in both types of journals was their attempt to represent and illustrate many areas of women's accomplishments and those areas that women desired to achieve as well as to address the socio-political rights denied to women. Although the Egyptian journal *Ruz al-Yusuf* was originally founded to include articles and news about Egypt's arts and culture, it later used that space to also incorporate many critical essays and illustrations about the political figures of the time. The interesting point about these journals pertains to their specific ideological trends and associations, which I have tried to briefly explain within the body of my argument in the chapter by including short biographical paragraphs on a few female editors.

In chapter three, I have traced the historical roots of the emergence of the discourse as well as the practice of *zan-e emrouzi/al-mara' al-jidida* (the "New Woman") in Iran and Egypt, by exploring the historical process of the development of performing arts, highlighting major artistic and cultural tropes, which gave meaning to concepts such as *asl/al-asala* (authentic

culture), *sonnat/al-sunna* (tradition), and *tajaddod/al-jidida* (modernity). In Iran, storytelling, musical pieces which accompanied adaptations of Western plays, and *tasnif* and in Egypt, a language of blended classical and colloquial Egyptian Arabic, the improvisation, inclusion of the music as an essential part of the play, *takht* ensemble, and genre of *taqtuqa* formed these tropes. This section, similar to chapter five, emphasizes the role that middle to upper class intelligentsia played in generating continuity and change from the pre nineteenth century popular forms of performing arts to the twentieth century's new forms and genres of music and theatrical plays, and the emergence of the "New Woman" both as a discourse as well as a practice. Under stylistic and artistic influences from Europe and within an atmosphere of nationalist and anti-colonial ideologies, male vocalists, poets, and actors attempted to perpetuate what was considered as cultural roots and the meaning of the tradition in their transformed artistic products. Although male artists staged women both as a discourse as well as a practice in order to integrate the questions of tradition and modernity in performing arts, women, in an unprecedented way, welcomed the stage with their creative individual and nationalist spectacle by elevating its possibilities in their professional works as well as personal lives, while realizing that they had to move past its limitations of artistic and social traditions in order to claim their rights to their artistic and individual selves.

Chapter four is a brief overview of the personal and artistic lives of Iranian music celebrity of the interwar period Qamar al-Molouk Vaziri and Egyptian musical theatre artist Munira al-Mahdiyya. Exploring the significant meaning of the concept of continuity and change within performing arts, this chapter seeks to highlight the persona of these two artists as examples of both the discursive as well as practical emergence of the new woman in the performing arts. This persona was associated with private as well as public struggles,

challenges, and transformations, which contributed to the rise of *zan-e emrouzi/al-mar'a al-jidida* (the “New Woman”). While socio-political transformations of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries were instrumental to the formation of the phenomenon of the “New Woman” in both countries, the rise of consciousness about the possibility of having a special place within that historical process made Qamar and Munira the eventual new women of the twentieth century. In different ways but with similar consciousness about shifting boundaries of the public and private realms of the culture of the body performance, Qamar and Munira moved in and out of the *qasinos* line of performance art, including one’s feminist consciousness, feminine persona, artistic and creative talents, nationalist, self, and social responsibility, to define the interlocking meanings of the artistic and subversive performance of the “New Woman” defined by and for women.

In chapter five I argue that cinema, both as a physical and an ideological space in Iran and Egypt, expanded the developmental process of the performing arts, which included music and plays. The tie that was created between the establishment of cinema as spatialized transformation of theatre- and music-halls, the refashioning of the modern city with new streets, bridges, and resident neighborhoods, and the emergence of the phenomenon of *zan-e emrouzi/al-mar'a al-jidida* (the “New Woman”) as *shahri/al-madani* (urban/secular) generated a specific meaning for women in performance art in general, and performing arts in particular. It facilitated the path for the masses to see performing arts as an acceptable and respectable futuristic carrier for women, a thought and idea which had been quite unthinkable in both countries two decades before. On the ideological level, the production of the first Iranian talkie film by an Iranian director, and the first Egyptian feature film by an Egyptian producer idealized the rise of the urban/secular “New Woman” as the epitome of national independence, at a time

when Iranian and Egyptian cinema were struggling to free themselves from the domineering European market and to attempt to establish a national industry within their own borders. Whereas in Iran, a male director attempted to open the question of a national film industry through his feature film, *Dokhtar-e Lor* (A Girl from Lor), in Egypt, a female actress gave life to the same discourse by producing the first Egyptian feature film, *Layla*. Both movies used a narrative as well as a visual language to point out the questions of national independence, modernity through a call for tradition, and elimination of social injustices within their societies. Both films opened the doors of the profession of the performing arts and its latest form, cinema, to women as actresses and producers.

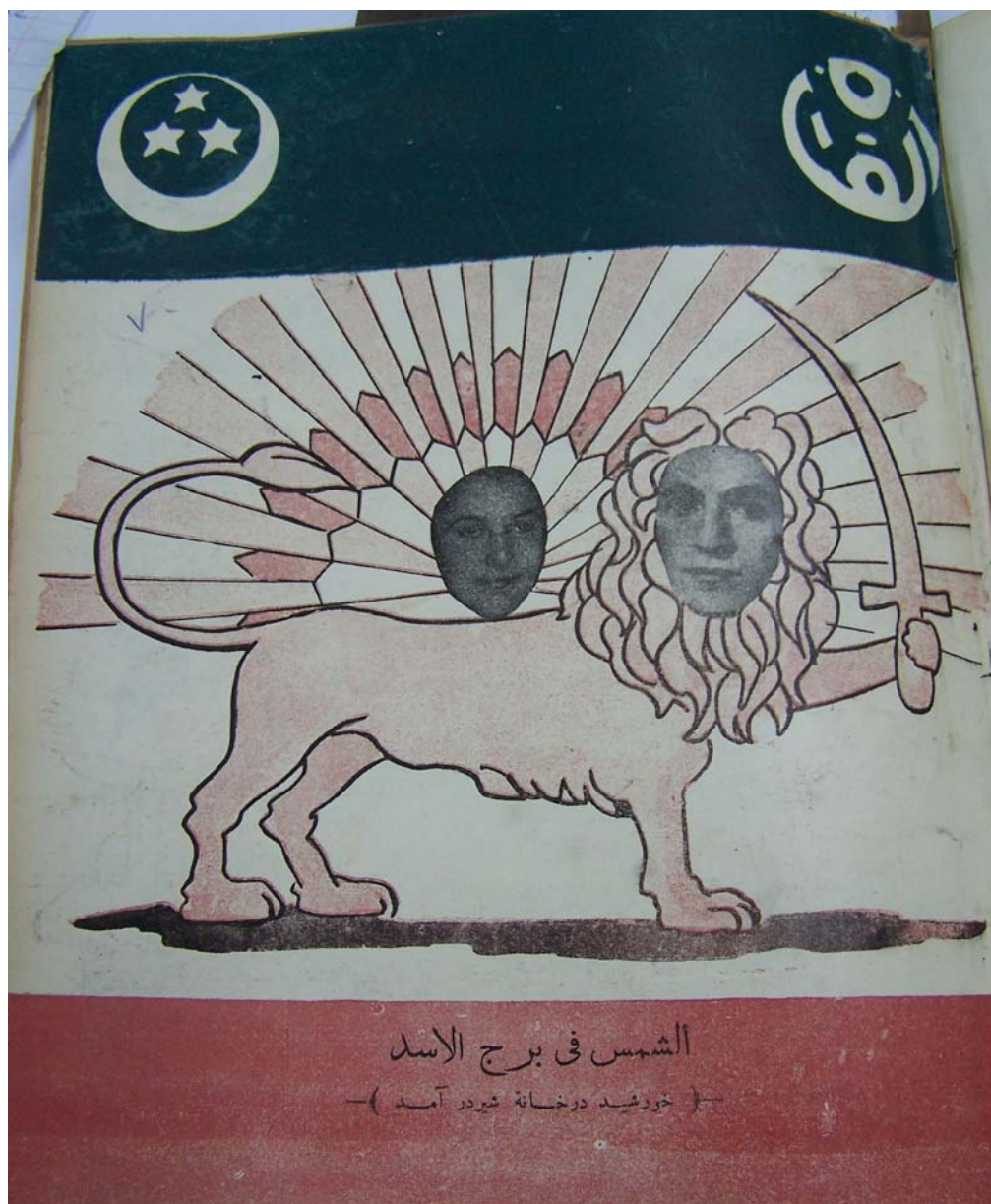


Figure 1: *Al-Shams fi Burj al-Asad* (The Sun is Rising in the House of Lion), Images of Princess Fawzia and Vali'ahd-e Iran on the Occasion of their Wedding Union. (*al-Fatat* 70 (March 1939): 4).



Figure 2: Ms. Nourhemadeh (Egyptian) and Ms. Sai'd Morad (Iranian) Photographed during their Attendance at The Congress of Eastern Women Held in Tehran in 1938 (Salami, Gholamreza and Afsaneh Najmabadi, eds. *Nezhat Neswan-e Sharq (The Women's Awakening Movement of the East)*: 376).

Chapter One

Visual Public Sphere, the New Woman, and Cultural Identity through Performance: A

Literature Review

Visual Public Sphere and Cultural Identity

For a look at the historiography of the public sphere it is indispensable to begin with Jurgen Habermas's articulation of the civil society versus the state. Habermas defines the public sphere, or what could be termed as the personal or private in the Middle Ages, simply as the mediator between society and the state. Citizens who form a public body or an institution beyond political life of the state, to discuss matters of general interest and demand that the information be accessible to the public, based on the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions, subordinate the political control of the state. According to Habermas, changes in social, political, and economic situations from "classical" to "medieval," "literary," "bourgeois," and "mediatized" time constituted different versions of the public sphere, producing its gradual evolution. For Habermas, however, practice of the public sphere associated with modernity grew out of a specific phase of bourgeois society, for the first time during the Renaissance and later in the eighteenth century, when the feudal estates were transformed, religious freedom gained private autonomy, and the institutions of authority asserted their independence from the princely courts. Habermas used the public sphere as a category of social organization which after Hegel's and Marx's distinctions between family, civil society, and state opened a new path for scholarship in the field of public and private, modern society, and culture and politics.⁴¹ Other German

⁴¹ . Jurgen Habermas, *The Structure Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1989).

scholars and French historians and critics developed Habermas's theoretical formulation further in different directions.⁴²

In the liberal model of the public sphere the signifier of national community building, the press, was transformed from being "a mere organ for the spreading of news" into "bearers and leaders of public opinion." In England, France, and the United States, the "transition from the literary journalism to the public services of the mass media" occurred in the 1830s.⁴³ In general, historians dealing with the emergence of "public opinion" through press as well as other means of mass communication public have used Habermas's concept of the public sphere as an appropriate tool of analysis.⁴⁴ At the same time these historians have also identified theoretical gaps relevant to Habermas's argument which address the question of ethnicity, race, gender, and other social categories. Studies of the eighteenth century French Revolution and its aftermath in the nineteenth century have been good examples.⁴⁵ One significant context of the history of the

⁴² . According to Landes, Habermas's formulations of the public sphere lacked particular historical analysis which welcomed subsequent contributions both oriented to "enrich" and "displace" that original thought. One contribution came from other German theorists who generated "debates, on the 'proletarian' and 'fascist' public sphere, by exploring "the rise and transformation of 'counterpublic, both revolutionary and reactionary." French Historians, on the other hand, considered "public as a cultural as well as a political formation." They challenged Habermas's "utopian bend of classical bourgeois public sphere" by a broad "range of symbolic representations such as theatrical, graphic, scientific, literary-journalistic, and political." The emergence of the early modern state produced "efficient forms of surveillance and power over the lives of individuals." See Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 6; For French scholarship on this subject see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

⁴³ . "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, eds. Stephen E. Bronner and Douglas M. Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989), 136-142; Negt, Oskar and Alexander Kluge, eds., *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

⁴⁴ . Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Celebres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁴⁵ . For critiques of Habermas on essentializing the citizen in terms of gender and race see Harold Mah, "Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians," *Journal of Modern History* 72 (March 2000): 153-82; Seyla Benhabib, *Democracy and Difference: Contesting Boundaries of the Political* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996); Jean L. Cohen, "Critical Social Theory and Feminist Critiques: The Debate with Jürgen

French Revolution and its aftermath in the nineteenth century has been the question of women and their participation in French urban society. Some historians have argued for the eighteenth century as the epitome of women's influence in politics by forming salons, versus the nineteenth century as the period of women's absence in the political arena.⁴⁶ Others believed that women lost their power in the sphere of politics during the Revolution and were forced to assume a subordinate place in the family by the Napoleonic Code.⁴⁷

Recent arguments, however, have made the point that women's "private" or "familial" spheres were strongly connected to politics after the 1793 law banned women's clubs.⁴⁸ One study, in particular, has addressed contradictions which existed between these prescribed ideals and women's "practices" and daily presences in urban social spaces.⁴⁹ Extending Henri Lefebvre's definition of "social space" formed by people and their practices, Denise Davidson's work has questioned the binary oppositions placed between the concepts of private and public. She has given a fresh understanding of Habermas's concept of the public sphere in the context of the post-revolutionary construction of identities for women by drawing on the activities and

Habermas," in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1995), 57-90; Special Issue on The Black Public Sphere, *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (Fall 1994); Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere, A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1-32; Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*.

⁴⁶ . Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*; Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Steven Kale, "Women, the Public Sphere, and the Persistence of Salons," *French Historical Studies* 25 (Winter 2002): 115-48.

⁴⁷ . James F. McMillan, *France and Women 1789-1914: Gender, Society, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), chpt. 3; Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and Their French Revolution*, trans. Katherine Streip (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁴⁸ . Suzanne Desan, "Reconstructing the Social after the Terror: Family, Property, and the Law in Popular Politics," *Past and Present* 164 (Aug. 1999): 81-121; Steven Kale, "Women, Salons, and the State in the aftermath of the French Revolution," *Journal of Women's History* 13 (Winter 2002): 54-80; Anne Verjus, *Le Cens de la Famille: les Femmes et le Vote, 1789-1848* (Paris: Belin, 2002); Jennifer Heuer, "Hats on for the Nation: Women, Servants, Soldiers and the 'Sign of the French'," *French History* 16 (March 2002): 28-52.

⁴⁹ . Jo burr Margadant, "Gender, Vice, and Political Imagery in Postrevolutionary France: Reinterpreting the Failure of the July Monarchy, 1830-48," *American Historical Review* 104 (Dec. 1999): 1481.

interactions which took place in some particular social spaces such as city squares, theatre halls, clubs, and cafes.⁵⁰

In the Middle East, and in particular in Egypt and Iran, despite the fact that actual formation of modern political states in Habermasian terms was an early twentieth century event, the emergence of the “public” in terms of the structural transformation of the citizenry of the members of the nation-state was initially a nineteenth century phenomena. British colonial rule in Egypt and the Russian and British encroachments in Iran during the nineteenth century not only had delayed the process of state formation but had also created a pro-nationalist environment appropriate for the emergence of the state as a public body of citizenry. Therefore, in parallel to the process of nation-state making that was taking place during the nineteenth century, a developmental process of “public opinion” forming also took place. This practice of making the “public” participants, both by state officials as well as non-state actors, was a peculiar aspect of the emergence of the public sphere in modern states of the Middle East and India, distinct from that of the European societies.⁵¹ Isa Blumi has pointed out the process of decentralization of the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century under the authority of the Ottoman statesmen as the initial stage of increasing the autonomy of regional governments, before the post war “neo-liberal” advocacy. He addressed the role that local and regional elites played in both “conveying Ottoman state reform innovations” and “instigating local challenges to state power.” Rejecting the dichotomous idea of relations, Blumi places the emergence of the

⁵⁰ . Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of the Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), 6; Denise Davidson, *France after Revolution: Urban Life, Gender, and the New Social Order* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁵¹ . Srirupa Roy, “Seeing a State: National Commemorations and the Public sphere in India and Turkey,” (Outline for Conference on *Secularism, Religious Nationalism, and the State: Visual Practices in the Public Sphere in Comparative Perspective, Theoretical Underpinning and Methodological Basis*, American University in Beirut, April 2005).

modern world and state within a “dialectical change” between representatives of state administrations and local/regional actors.⁵²

In a recent comparative study of the public sphere in post-independent India and Turkey, Srirupa Roy has also pointed out that contrary to the gradual evolution in the form of the public sphere in Europe, “rupture and discontinuity in state forms and modalities of government” dominated the process of “building a sovereign nation-state out of the ruins of empire.” Roy has stated that because of this rupture “two distinct but related setd of institutional efforts” took place in post-independent India and Turkey, one a project of the nation-building or collective identity formation and the other a process of state-building or the establishment of institutional identity. The production of the “public” was the direct outcome of “the dynamic negotiations between state and non-state actors.” For the state to be able to accomplish the spectacle of “republican commemoration” the presence and participation of people were important.⁵³

Modernization policies of the first ruler of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, in the areas of military forces, education, and economics following the aftermath of Napoleon’s brief conquest of the country had later stimulated strong debates about nationalism in the newly emerged press, which initially had been established for official government, economic and military purposes. Later in the century, a European-style educated middle class began to emerge and participate in journalism, contributing to the foundation of a public sphere for the expression of public opinions. The cultural and economic transformation of the society after the arrival of the British in 1882 also had great impact on the formation of anti-British debates at the beginning of the twentieth century. The mass uprising of the 1919 anti-British revolution and the establishment

⁵² . Isa Blumi, *Rethinking the Late Ottoman Empire: A Comparative Social and Political History of Albania and Ymen, 1878-1918* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2008).

⁵³ . Roy, “Seeing a State,” 3-5.

of the parliament and a constitution in 1923, provided a space for Egyptians not only to consider but also to imagine themselves as a nation. In Iran, the decline of the Qajar dynasty at the beginning of the twentieth century initiated a process of internal upheavals moving toward the 1906-11 Constitutional Revolution and the emergence of an imposed “modern” state in 1925. Pro- and anti-colonial debates filled the pages of many journals of the time which were founded by European-style educated intellectuals. The formation of an independent space for public opinions in interwar Iran had strong ties with the prospect of strengthening the future of a modern state instead of only imagining the foundation of a modern state as was the case in Egypt.

However, the formation of public opinion regarding socio-political aspects of the nation and the state, which occurred in Egypt and Iran during the nineteenth century, was a sexually segregated activity. Although it anticipated placing the “figure of a woman in crisis”⁵⁴ at the center of the debates about reform and *tajaddod* (renovation in Persian) and *al-jidida* (modernity in Arabic) it did not open itself to welcoming women’s organic activities and actual public participation. Scholarship on the emergence of women’s prescribed role in public has presented different perspectives on this topic. One study argues that in Iran the emergence of women’s presence in public was contemporaneous with the consolidation of the feminization of beauty and disappearance of the representation of homoeroticism of the earlier period.⁵⁵ This happened at the end of the nineteenth century when it was possible and acceptable for women to “come into public view.” As a major transformation in gender and sexual definitions, the appearance of female beauty in public was tied to Iranian males traveling in Europe and being courted by

⁵⁴ . For the original use of this term see Farfan, *Women, Modernism, and Performance*.

⁵⁵ . Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Gender and the Sexual Politics of Public Visibility in Iranian Modernity,” in *Going Public: Feminism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Private Sphere*, eds. Joan W. Scott and Debra Keates (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 44-68.

women in parties, conversations, dances, and theatres and plays. “Correspondingly, gender-differentiated notions of beauty became consolidated.” As a result, beloved-male images both in male literary and visual representations disappeared and homosexual desire was considered unnatural and the outcome of the “practice of women’s seclusion and gender segregation.”⁵⁶

Reintegrating issues of sexuality and gender, Najmabadi points out that in fact the practice of women’s unveiling in Iran by the state aimed both “to overcome the backwardness of women (e.g. transform them into companionate wives, educated mothers, and useful citizens) and make same-sex practices, especially among men, socially redundant. In opposition to the social practices of the Qajar, where compulsory homosociality was combined with “procreative heterosexuality,” leaving the “structure of sexual desire indeterminate,” Iranian modernity focused on a “regime of compulsory heterosociality that was to underwrite normative heterosexuality.”⁵⁷ Public performances of normative sexuality became the representational policies of the modern construction of gender. In the process of what Najmabadi calls the “pressure to typologize sexuality,” men and women had to be refashioned, women appearing without a chador, wearing hats, gloves, and long overcoats, and men abandoning ‘*abas* (long and enveloping outer garments) and wearing suits, ties, and hats. “While shaving beards became the signifier for the representation of this new man, mustaches deflected the association with homosexual behavior.” The desirability of heterosocialization, unveiling of women and encouraging them to socialize with men, and transforming marriage from a sexual contract to a romantic union was a call to women to join men in building a new nation. Socializing between men and women served to civilize men (modernize), and reform family and marriage.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ . Ibid., 57.

⁵⁷ . Ibid., 59.

⁵⁸ . Ibid.

Juan Cole looked at the economic roots of the emergence of a women's movement in Egypt and its public significance.⁵⁹ According to Cole, class distinctions between the upper middle class and lower middle class Egyptians at the turn of the century had great impact on defining discourses on the emancipation of women. Agrarian capitalists and petite bourgeoisie, two classes of the landowning strata, which were produced by Muhammad Ali as part of his modernization project, went through a dramatic identity crisis in the aftermath of the British colonial domination over Egypt. British control of the material resources of Egypt had taken away opportunities for the country to become an industrialized state. The peripheral position of Egypt in the world market had a serious impact on internal socioeconomic structures and developments as well as on the position and status of women. Whereas both the upper middle class and the lower middle class Egyptians had previously shown a special interest in Turko-Circassian life-style, arrival of the Europeans turned that admiration towards Europe's culture and values.

Part of this admiration included the status of women in the society and the discourse of education and emancipation of women. According to Cole, while agrarian capitalists such as Qasim Amin (1863-1908), Muhammad Abduh (1894-1905), and to a certain degree Rashid Rida (1865-1935) advocated women's education and lifting of the face veil for women, members of the petite bourgeoisie such as Tala't Harb (1867-1941) promoted the idea of education for women but argued for "strict veiling and seclusion practices." In his book, *al-Mar'a al-Jidida* (*The New Woman*), Amin associated the seclusion of women with the economic downfall of the country criticizing those women who, in the habit of Turko-Circassian lifestyle, continued having a life of lavish expenditures. Amin believed that emancipation of women in Europe was

⁵⁹ . Juan Cole, "Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn of the Century Egypt," *International Journal of the Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (1981): 387-407.

part of their progress towards developing a rational way of thinking and a scientific mind. For Amin, education of women was a way to eliminate the intellectual gap which existed between upper middle class men and their wives, and it would encourage young elites to marry. In addition to a cost-efficient household management, women as a great labor force could benefit the country through the process of rational economizing, to increase its capital for investment; therefore, women's entry into public life should be viewed as an important part of the progress and advancement of Egypt as a country and as a nation. Amin believed that the number of lower class women workers would inevitably increase, so women from the upper class should also enter the labor force on the same scale in order to keep themselves financially independent.

Of course, Amin's argument was hard to realize in practical terms. The British had no interest in providing mass education for Egyptians and creating "dissatisfied intellectuals" who would rise against British hegemony, the way it had happened in India. Lord Cromer intended to only produce a small group of technicians who could provide civil service for the British. In addition, lack of industrialization simply did not provide urban jobs for women on a wide scale. Tight competition among members of the lower middle class of Egyptians would have made women's entry into the labor force a big threat. As late as 1917, there were only 786 women enrolled in government schools. Contrary to Amin, the well-known entrepreneur Tal'at Harb favored women's education but disagreed on women's entry into the labor force. Harb grew up in Cairo in a petite bourgeois urban family, but around 1905 he became a major landowner and climbed into the elite class. He joined Mustafa Kamil in objecting to women's emancipation at the turn of the century. He claimed that Amin's position on women's emancipation was not the first voice on the woman's question and had a precedent. However, that precedent came from a Christian Copt and should be applied only to Christian women rather than to Muslim ones. Harb

used the Quran and traditions of the Prophet to argue for the validity of seclusion and veiling for women. However, he realized that Egypt lacked women teachers at the time and suggested that female teachers from India and other Islamic countries could be brought to educate Egyptian girls. To Harb, European cultural values imposed on Egyptians had brought “deterioration in the moral fabric of Muslim society” and European commerce had caused the loss of the national economy and a threat to its national institutions.

Juan Cole places the debate on feminism at the beginning of the twentieth century in the context of class conflict. To upper middle class men, “even this limited sort of women’s emancipation threatened to increase competition for scarce professional positions, to deny them a traditional source of status as guardians of family honor, and to impose upon them values associated with their European competitors and oppressors.” To upper middle class men like Qasim Amin, Muhammad Abduh, and to a certain degree Rashid Rida, women’s emancipation “was the solution to problems arising from their new needs and responsibilities as agrarian capitalists.”⁶⁰

Obviously, women were not merely passive spectators to the rise of their presence in public. Scholars of Middle Eastern gender and women’s studies have produced pioneering works addressing the use of print culture by women as a medium of the public sphere in articulating women’s perspectives on the issues of nationalist consciousness, national identity, and formation of the nation-state in Iran and Egypt. This body of work had identified and introduced the role feminist nationalists played in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11 and the Egyptian anti-British revolt of 1919 and their aftermath.⁶¹ Using various theoretical

⁶⁰ . Ibid., 404-5.

⁶¹ . On Iran see Janet Afary, *Anjomanhay-e Nimeh Serri Zanan dar Nehzat-e Mashrouteh (The Semi-Secret Women’s Associations in the Constitutional Revolution)*, trans. Javad Yousefiyan (Tehran: Nashr-e Banou, 1998);

and disciplinary approaches, it also examined the questions of family, nation, feminism, and production of knowledge about public spheres in Iran and Egypt.⁶² Some scholars emphasized print culture and its role in national identity formation.⁶³ Most of these studies have concentrated on the late nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth century.

While this period was considered a time of “decolonization of consciousness” and the beginning of women’s participation in public life in the areas of philanthropy, journalism, and establishing organizations, claims for equal political and legal rights with men for women, such as the right to vote and work, faced strong resistance both by secular and religious reformers as well as the government’s authorities. Habermas’s argument that local elite activities will be more effective when state bureaucracy does not interfere certainly was not delivered in Egypt and Iran. Resistance to anti-colonial interventions both in Iran and Egypt had blurred the distinctive lines of argument about women’s status in the society between intellectuals and governmental authorities. When it came to the subject of women’s emancipation and public presence, in particular in the area of politics and work, there was an overall unity between two

On Egypt see Sha’rawi, Hoda, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist, 1870 – 1924*, trans. Margot Badran (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1987).

⁶² . On Iran see Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804-1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Valentine Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003); Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini* (New York: Praeger, 1981); On Egypt see Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*; Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*; Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 – 1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); On both Iran and Egypt see Lila Abu-Lughod, ed., *Remaking Women*.

⁶³ . On Iran see Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-11: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Roshanak Mansour, “Chehreh-e Zan dar Jarayed-e Mashrutiat (The Image of Woman in the Constitutional Press),” *Nimeh-e Digar (The Other Half)* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 11-30; On Egypt see Beth Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Mona L. Russell, *Creating the New Egyptian Woman: Consumerism, Education, and National Identity, 1863 – 1922* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

parties, with minimum ideological differences. As Juan Cole argued, class distinctions between the upper middle class and lower middle class was one particular area in Egypt where ideological differences appeared. In Iran, as Najmabadi discussed, differences in secular and religious backgrounds of middle class Iranians also created different opinions and points of view.⁶⁴ However, the formation of a secular state in Iran in 1925 and the semi-independent status of Egypt after the drafting of the 1923 constitution generated an environment of pro-women legislative acts despite the exclusion of women from political arenas. This process, as Roy has stated in the case about India, has “entailed two distinct but related set of ideational and institutional efforts,” one “nation-building,” the other “state-building.” In order for the modern state to be imagined as well as be seen as a solidified entity, a visible and a visual public needed to be formed.⁶⁵

The “New Woman,” Modernity, and Gendered Visual Public Sphere

The term “New Woman” initially appeared in 1894 in an article in the *North American Review* by British journalist Sarah Grand.⁶⁶ The European press and Anglo-American novelists immediately popularized the term.⁶⁷ A social reality and a cultural concept, the term was used in the United States from 1890s to 1920s by several generations experimenting with new gender roles. By the time of the World War I, it included, but was not limited to, those who thought of

⁶⁴ . Najmabadi, “Gender and the Sexual Politics of Public Visibility in Iranian Modernity,” Cole, “Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn of the Century Egypt.”

⁶⁵ . Roy, “Seeing a State.”

⁶⁶ . On connection between race and the “New Woman” see Angela Pao, *The Orient of the Boulevards: Exoticism, Empire and Nineteenth-Century Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

⁶⁷ . Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siecle France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

themselves as feminists.”⁶⁸ A world-traveling cultural identity image/signifier, the term was used by Euro-American intellectuals and artists during late nineteenth century to address the question of “modernity” and the emergence of a new culture of the public sphere. Its western reference included feminist notions of moral and economic freedom, cosmopolitanism, and foreign influence as a threat to moral and national integrity, but it did not emphasize legal and political rights.⁶⁹ Rejecting the traditional notion of domesticity and its moral association with “sacrifice, and self-denial,” the Euro-American definition of the “New Woman” incorporated the “cult of personality, self-development, and self-fulfillment” with less emphasis on political and legal rights.⁷⁰ In 1916, feminist anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons wrote, “the new woman means the woman not yet classified, perhaps not classifiable, the woman new not only to men, but to herself.”⁷¹ Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, written in 1879 and staged for the first time in London in 1889, ignited the proliferation of a series of public images about “the woman question,” despite the delay in the real appearance of the new women who were inspired by the rebellious character of the “New Woman.”⁷²

While earlier scholarship has explored the notion of discursive as well as social representations of the term “New Woman” within Euro-American continents, contemporary

⁶⁸ . Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 6.

⁶⁹ . Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, 22-3.

⁷⁰ . Ibid., 21-3.

⁷¹ . Glenn, *Female Spectacle*, 5.

⁷² . Ibsen’s critical view of the bourgeois marriage in Scandinavia was depicted through Nora, the main character of *A Doll’s House*. She was a young mother trapped in an oppressive marriage who by the end of the play decided to leave her authoritarian husband to “find moral, personal freedom.” *A Doll’s House*, later became the subject of feminist critics who argued for her individualistic gesture and the aftermath of Nora’s departure, asking the question of what happens to Nora after she breaks her dependency and leaves her husband’s house. Where does she go with no professional skill to gain her a career? See Roberts.

studies of some of the most visible displays of that definition in terms of the transformation of women's identity formation in non Euro-American countries during the interwar period have flourished in recent years. In Japan, during the 1920s, middle class women used indigenous changes extracted from "the commodification of everyday life" to identify themselves with the ideology of modern. The emergence of a "multiplicity of feminine identities," based on the mutable images, practices, and narratives about women which emerged in the 1920s, challenged the myth of a fixed identity which placed topics such as "good wife and wise mother ideology," home, and family within the context of feudal constructs. Three new types of urban women emerged during the 1920s in Japan: "the bobbed-haired, short skirted 'modern' girl (*modongaru*); the self-motivated housewife (*shufu*); and the rational, extroverted professional working woman (*shokugyo fujin*)."⁷³ Despite limited possibilities for consumption, "fantasies of consumerism" were created in women's mass magazines through the appearance of images of "modern" girls and professional working-women as well as articles including information about upper-class women. Many women subscribed to, read and wrote to these journals, which contributed to the "increasing feminization of self-cultivation." Thus the ideas, not the actual commodities, set a path for the "modern girl," the housewife, and the professional working women to redefine "modern," and the interest in new ways of thinking led Japanese women "in search for a language and symbols to differentiate themselves and to express their desires" with "previously unimagined possibilities."⁷³

The interwar period's "new phenomenon," mirroring changes in behavior, dress, and ways of thinking, can be illustrated in other wide-spread examples of the emergence of the "New Woman" in the Middle East. By forming the Arab Woman's Association (AWA), Palestinian

⁷³ . Barbara Hamil Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

women, during the British Mandate Period (1920-48), transformed the constructed definition of gender emerging in the press. “AWS continually asserted its identity as a *women’s* movement” embedded with “nationalist politics.” Palestinian women created their own form of indigenous feminism, which “syncretized traditional, modern, and reformist attributes,” with multiple competing and conflicting visions of “nation” for women. Women started to defy the dress code much earlier than 1948. In 1929 a group of women in Jenin gathered in a coffeehouse unveiled. In the 1930s women appeared in photographs in short dresses, and schoolgirls in 1926 went to school in short skirts, high heels, and shingled hair.⁷⁴

As the examples of images of the “New Woman” above have displayed, articulation of the new modes of women’s identity formation delineated various aspects of the public sphere, in relation to the process of nation-state building. As Nancy Fraser has suggested, the concept of Habermas’s “Westphalian” public sphere exclusively addressed the territorial and national state-bounded definition of the public sphere. Her call for a “post-Westphalian,” “post-national,” and “transnational” study of the public sphere offers new perspectives.⁷⁵ However, most scholarship on the “Westphalian” formation of the public sphere have emphasized its discursive aspect. In the transformation from French absolutism to bourgeois society, Joan Landes has suggested that, “the shift in the organization of public life was linked to a radical transformation of the system of cultural representations.” The passage from the Liberal Old Regime in France to the modern republican time marked the collapse of the older patriarchy, which constituted “*gendering*” of the public sphere. “If we think about the public sphere at all, it is difficult to ignore its gendered meanings.” Modern Republicanism in the process of the bourgeois revolutions of the late

⁷⁴ . Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and its “New” Women: The Palestinian Women’s Movement, 1920-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003)

⁷⁵ . Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,”: 56-80.

eighteenth century remained faithful to the prejudices of the classical world by maintaining the dominant representational system of the Old Regime, “one that imaged men as properly political and women as naturally domestic.”⁷⁶

Feminism emerged through the use of a classical vocabulary of gendered bourgeois male discourse that relied on women’s domesticity and “the silencing of ‘public’ women, of the aristocratic and popular classes.” From a feminist perspective however, reflection on this masculine public needs to take into consideration the relation of the public sphere to women and to feminism. According to Landes, “the Republic was constructed against women, not just without them.” Despite its failure to encompass political emancipation, post-revolutionary France transformed the woman question into a category of gender, producing “two variant but interrelated outcomes,” domesticity and feminism.⁷⁷ Landes’s articulation of the relationship between women and the public sphere helps us to understand Habermas’s view on the public as a cultural as well as a political formation. Srirupa Roy has focused on the commemorative rituals of the state and the nation in India and Turkey, displaying the central role of images and embodied practices as “the ways in which the formation of publicness was bound up in discourses and practices of nation- and state-building.” According to Roy, “seeing the state” or being asked to “see in a particular way” constituted people as “the public.” “Images of the state and of the state-citizen and state-nation” create “the public” as “self-conscious spectators of a stage display of and about ourselves.”⁷⁸

Performance, Performance Art, and Feminist Public Sphere

⁷⁶ . Landes, 2.

⁷⁷ . Ibid., 12.

⁷⁸ . Roy, 3.

Linked to a performative act, the emergence of the discursive as well as practical concept of the “New Woman” was initially used in theatre and performance art. Functioning as a liminal site between the performance of everyday life and performative act of social practices, performance art and its diverse forms of artistic and cultural activity had offered women alternative venues for the transformation of their identities. The public stage of theatre- and music-halls as the realm of a visual and visible culture, for example, constituted the ground for the appearance of the public sphere in the process of the formation of the state and the public. Women positioned as the signifier of modernity within the hegemonic discourse and practice of mainstream theatre included both the emergence of a gender-play by the state and its bourgeoisie representatives as well as an oppositional feminist public sphere. Recent scholarship on the connecting theme of performance and the feminist public sphere has offered diverse perspectives.

Penny Farfan has used the concept of the “feminist public sphere” as a “model of the analysis of diverse forms of artistic and cultural activity by women” which operated as an “oppositional ideology” challenging “the existing reality of gender subordination.” She has used the term “model of a feminist counter-public sphere” in discussing the role that French female artists played in the formation of a public discourse on gender and culture during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Her encompassing study of the history of women, modernism, and theatre addresses performance as a “contested space and theatre as performative practice in which “signifying acts may enable new subject positions and new perspectives to emerge.”⁷⁹

⁷⁹ . Farfan.

While Farfan focused on performance in terms of both performance arts and political activities including suffrage demonstrations, lectures, and courtroom trials as a medium for women's liberation, Mary Louise Roberts viewed performance tied to the cultural crisis of liberal ideology regarding a woman's role as wife and mother emerging at the fin-de-siecle. Understood as a problem of cultural change, the phenomenon of the "New Woman," as a group of professional women doctors, journalists, engineers, and actresses as well as single women and those who entered unconventional marriages sought to challenge "the regulatory norms of gender."⁸⁰ Although the concept of the "New Woman" was translated in the context of independence and adoption of a "uniquely female discourse and language," Roberts considered feminist views of the "New Woman" not within the narrow definition of feminism as legal, political, and social reforms but rather in a dialectical relationship with French feminism of the time. Questioning the fixity of women's body as essential, which ignored class, race, and ethnicity of women, the rise of the "New Woman" used theatrical metaphor to display "a woman's identity as a matter of cultural constraint rather than nature."⁸¹ While novels and newspapers were venues for elevation of the "New Woman," the stage became a "natural setting" for critique of gender norms and the development of the personhood and identity of the "New Woman."

Roberts has used the term "feminist aesthetics" to examine the life and work of French artists and new women such as Marguerite Durand, Misme, Severine and GYP on and off the stage. As Durand stated feminist aesthetics could also "be used as political tools" and "resistance to the New Woman of the period was as much aesthetic as political in nature." According to Roberts, although Durand had a short acting career, the influence of it was strongly

⁸⁰ . Roberts.

⁸¹ . Ibid.

felt on her professional public image and presentation of self as a journalist. However, acting was considered to pose a threat to the “naturalized female virtue so vital to Rousseau’s notions of sexual difference and French Republicanism;” therefore, “a trafficking in the self.” Placing beauty and elegance within the political context of being both visible and attractive, Durand’s view of feminism had a visual component, that of “seeing and being seen.” Departing from the tradition of salon sociability, “feminist aesthetics,” which encompassed performance on the stage as well as journalism, created a “New Woman” model for critiquing gender norms. “Actresses” were considered “as agents and metaphors of changing gender relations” and “professional theatre served as a crucial site for gender transgression.” The marginal status of the actresses allowed them more freedom than respectable women. Actresses owned the power to play with gender roles through performance on the stage, posing questions about gender as an “act rehearsed to perfection.”⁸²

The press was also another effective medium “to stage feminist aesthetics” through which to criticize the way gender identity was produced in France. This “golden age” of the press, both in the numbers it produced and its political and cultural influences, associated newspapers with the street, the public place, and the city itself. The new intellectual world with new mass consumer forms of capitalism replaced the older literary forms of entrepreneurship, producing feminization of mass culture and drawing on a modernist aesthetics that was construed in terms of pure visuality and the technology of vision. “In this way the public taste for reality was linked to the ‘spectacular’ culture taking shape in Haussmannized Paris-where seeing and being seen on the streets and in the theatre and cafes became a social imperative.” In a culture where men had constructed female identity, the principles of the new form of journalism called

⁸² . Ibid.

into question both the knowledge of politics and the politics of knowledge, the way in which vision itself was politicized – who was being seen and not seen- and in precisely what way, with the intention to give women a civic identity. Journalism and theatre had many points in common at the fin-de-siecle, such as being associated with modernity, having women writers who addressed issues of adultery, divorce and single-motherhood, profiting from their accessibility to upward mobility, and transforming daily events into a spectacle.⁸³

In addition, role-playing, performing, and theatricality were all the very aim of both journalism and theatre. Both actresses and journalists “acted out the instability of gender identity by exposing domestic ideals as conditional and volatile” and used a “series of disruptive acts including playacting, mimicry, parody, satire, hyperbole, and fantasy.” The disruptive acts could well be used as subverting and reinforcing conventional femininity since they were interpreted differently by male and female viewers. To see actresses as models for self-transformation sparked mainly change in women’s lives. The fin-de-siecle’s play with gender roles took place when gender roles were already under fire due to new educational opportunities, the unprecedented strength of the feminist movement, the recent reinstatement of divorce, and the widespread discursive obsession with the “crisis” of gender roles. On the other hand, “critique of bourgeois subjectivity provided new intellectual circumstances in which the self could be widely understood as performative.”⁸⁴

While Roberts has connected performance both on stage and through writing with the cultural crisis of challenges to the “the regulatory norms of gender of fin-de-siecle France” and views it as a form of “feminist aesthetics” with a political mission, Laurel Lengel and John

⁸³ . Ibid.

⁸⁴ . Ibid.

Warren address performance as a means through which scholars will be able to articulate women's communities, work, their communication channels, and ultimately their subversive acts within societies, at a moment when women's "verbal discourse" was difficult to achieve.⁷¹ Study of performance also creates new venues to address the intercultural communication theory and practice representing intersections of performance with culture and cultural identity in terms of differences in gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation.

Debunking culture in its conventional definition as essential and organic, Lengel and Warren argue that looking at women's performance as a mundane performative act on and off stage produces creative practices meaningful to a new way to understand culture and cultural identity. "Oral traditions, folklore, women's histories, and the unique ways women communicate interpersonally," all present theatrical and/or performative acts important to women's intercultural communication practices.⁷² By including articles both on critical analysis of theatrical performance as well as mundane enactment of gender as a work of (re)constituting power, the anthology intends to explore questions such as "Does performance act as a force of possible agency for women, or is it, conversely, a force of patriarchal ideology? Might it be both simultaneously? What are the concerns of women performers across nations and cultural differences? What personal, social and/or political functions might they see in and for their creative practice? What is their relationship with their audience? How does their work fit in with, and/or work against, the norms of their surrounding culture and society?"⁸⁵

⁷¹. Laurel Lengel and John T. Warren, eds. *Casting Gender: Women and Performance in Intercultural Contexts* (New York: P. Lang, 2005), 3.

⁷². Ibid.

⁸⁵. Ibid., 9.

Theatre as a grounding moment in the emergence of modern feminist consciousness has been the subject of Susan Glenn's study of the late nineteenth century popular theatre in the United States. Between 1880s and 1920s popular theatre became the stage for cultural, social, and political challenges to moral boundaries placed on women. "The New Women of the American popular theatre" made spectacles of themselves on the stage, contributing to the era's significant public assertion by women off the stage demanding their "rights to education, political participation, employment, and sexual expressiveness." As women became important in the process of challenging the concept of womanhood, theatre producers also took the opportunity to use them "as passive objects for audience consumption." "It is in the interplay between active and passive female spectacle that we see most vividly how the theatre became an important progenitor of two very different, but nevertheless equally modern, concepts of femininity."⁸⁶ Although these women did not use the term "feminist" for their actions, and their work did not intend to form any political agenda or a movement, they articulated and carried some of the same radical notions that a small group of women's rights advocates had provoked during the 1860s and 70s.⁸⁷

Emphasis on the theme of "independent personality or self-development" and "a greater sexual freedom" made these women performers also the predecessors of the modern feminist movement of the 1910s in the United States. However, the point that separates them from women off the stage is the unique cultural and social position they occupied in the society of time. Because of their use of the stage, their act of transgression was rewarded, where women off the stage were strongly criticized for the same position. Moreover, "the stage encouraged"

⁸⁶ . Ibid.

⁸⁷ . Glenn, 3.

them to “cultivate their individuality and their uniqueness.” “While these women were used by novelists and screenwriters as the symbols of “modern ideas about femininity... the extraordinary self-consciousness with which they positioned themselves in relationship to modern social, intellectual, and aesthetic practices and debates made them more than symbols of cultural change.” It was therefore, a paradoxical role that the stage played in transforming ideas about female identity, promoting women’s emancipation on the stage while placing low value on the same sort of action off the stage.⁸⁸

Performance, Performance Arts, and Gendered Visual Public Spheres in Iran and Egypt

The Euro-American scholarship articulated in the above review has explored the ties between theatre, performance art, and the stage, and the challenges placed on the “regular norms of gender relationships,” female performative practices, and the emergence of modern feminist consciousness. Scholarship on the Middle East that connects the themes of gender, performance, and feminist consciousness has only emerged recently and in a sporadic form in the United States and a few European countries. These works usually place the study of performance within the fields of media studies and popular culture. Karin van Nieuwkerk’s pioneering ethnographic study of the lives of Egyptian female performers, presented by themselves, explores the important connection between the social perception of the profession of entertainment as “a trade like any other” and the controversial prescribed religious and cultural views of the female body in Egypt. She raises the question of “whether the low esteem of female performers is mainly related to the dishonor of the trade or to the prevailing gender ideology.”⁸⁹ Her interdisciplinary approach to this question and the notion of body as “an interesting field for anthropological and

⁸⁸ . Ibid., 7.

⁸⁹ . Karin van Nieuwkerk, *“A Trade Like Any Other”: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 2.

feminist research” is a fresh combination of historical analysis of the profession, ethnographic fieldwork, and studies of culture and society.

According to Van Nieuwkerk the profession was transformed from being a “refined art” in the late eighteenth century to becoming closely associated with prostitution during the nineteenth century. Only certain parts of the profession, such as the nightclubs, “regained prestige during the twentieth century,” while art schools and academies also “broke the former unity of the performing arts.” Thus, making distinctions between “the various forms and contexts of performances” is necessary in studying “the status of the profession.”⁹⁰ She contextualizes the historical definition and meaning of the entertainment as a “trade” within marginalized infamous professions, which shared common structural characteristics, such as diverging from the instruction of religious authorities regarding their serious devotion to God, being inattentive to and uncontrolled by the rules and regulations of the worldly authorities, and lacking professional associations, which resulted in making them weak in terms of their legal status in the society. Other factors, such as economic and social mobility of the entertainers, the image of “selling or exhibiting the body in public for money,” and being associated with heretical ideas, rebellion, and danger to the moral, sexual and social order had further made the trade an infamous and dishonorable occupation. Marginal, ambiguous, and liminal aspects of the profession of entertainment, similar to other marginal trades, make the “infamous people...taboo” since the liminal people are able to mediate between oppositions such as “life and death, illness and health, man and animal, and ultimately between self and not-self.”⁹¹

⁹⁰ . Ibid., 179-85.

⁹¹ . Ibid., 6-8.

In van Nieuwkerk's view, however, it is mainly the female body and not "the liminality of the profession itself" that had created such an ambiguous view of/and behavior towards the female performers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Egypt. Her anthropological analysis of "the relation between the social and cultural construction of gender and the status of performers" places her work within the framework of the recent emerging scholarship, which has investigated "the degree to which gender ideology affects musical thought and practice and how music reflects and affects intergender relations."⁹² It is not Islamic views on the female body as an accepted prescription but the need to investigate the presence of Islamic laws and views in contemporary Egyptian ways of thinking that makes Nieuwkerk's work significant. In people's minds, it is the women's association with shame and respect, instead of the Islamic concept of *fitna* as being dangerous, that defines the trade. Female entertainers, however, consider the profession as *haram* (dishonorable) for women, but they did not believe they were committing a shameful act. The concept of a dishonorable profession is related to the construction of gender and woman's body. No matter which public profession women take part in, the view of their sexuality plays an important role in evaluating their profession. Women "employ the power of their bodies," outside the accepted context of marriage, to obtain material goods for living, a notion related to the profession of prostitution. Female entertainers, however, try to disassociate the notion of their bodies as feminine and one-dimensional by behaving like men and presenting their bodies as neutral and productive.⁹³

In her study of the Egyptian artists and entrepreneurs, Virginia Danielson pointed out that the emergence of female singers and entertainers during the 1920s in Cairo became a publicity

⁹² . Ibid., 8-14.

⁹³ . Ibid.

venue for the recently emerged “magazines and newspaper columns dealing with theatre and music.”⁹⁴ Moreover, public visibility of these singers and entertainers also associated them with venues of mass media such as musical theatre, music-hall performances, public concerts and commercial recording as means of communication with the audience. As a professional guild, female singers during the nineteenth century performed in private festivities or royal courts, whereas during the twentieth century, female singers and performers “spent the waning years of their careers in theatre districts and music-halls which were established along the Nile.”⁹⁵

Through hard work and continuous efforts these performers took the opportunity offered to them to obtain “recognition of their artistic talent, personal fame, and fortune.” Despite the low value placed on singers, dancers, actors, and actresses, association of this profession with prostitution, and the presence of foreign soldiers in Egypt seeking vice, female singers and performers were able to “set standards of public behavior for entertainers by carrying a concept of dignity familiar to many ordinary Egyptian women into the domain of commercial entertainment.” At the same time, they “implanted an image in the public eye of the female singer as a talented and accomplished individual.”⁹⁶

In a catalogue to her compiled CD consisting of sixteen songs drawn from the holdings of the World and Traditional Music Section of the Sound Archive at the British Library, Amira Mitchell has articulated the role of the recording industry as an influential contributor to the success of female performers of the 1920s. Recording companies also made it possible for

⁹⁴ . Virginia Danielson, “Artists and Entrepreneurs: Female Singers in Cairo during the 1920s,” in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, eds. Nikki Kedie and Beth Baron (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 292-309.

⁹⁵ . Ibid., 295.

⁹⁶ . Ibid., 303-5.

female singers to let their voices be “heard by a mixed audience without having to actually perform in public.”⁹⁷ This saved the performer from shaming her family’s honor and the “corruption of public morals.” While a *fatwa* was issued by Egyptian religious leaders in 1923 to ban many nightclubs, including *Sala Badi’a* (Badi’a Masabni’s salon), “these cabaret songs could now be heard on gramophone records outside of their usual performance context, in the private home.” The decade following the Wall Street crash of 1929 witnessed a fall in record manufacturing and sales, in Egypt as in Europe, while the emergence of new media such as “[T]alkies (films with sound) and radio increased the competition.”⁹⁸

Walter Armbrust’s anthology, *Mass Mediations*, shifts the subject of research inquiry from what mass media and popular culture is in the Middle East toward what it does in those societies. Armbrust refuses the methodological approach of a “globalist rhetoric” and “postcolonial theories” connected to the new politically oriented trend of globalization in academia in favor of focusing our attention towards national borders and vernacular cultures which deal with smaller markets or the dynamics of localities in a region. He considers “definitions of the ‘local’” in correspondence with “the national.” Instead of arguing for the decisive impact of global on local social life, Armbrust believes that in many Middle Eastern societies “the nation-state is still a major player in the construction of musical taste and... cinema.” While he does not ignore the impact of globalization and “global flows,” he refuses the idea of “convergence with global pattern” for the Egyptian music market, for example, and promotes the notion that distinctive patterns of Egyptian society and life play a central role in

⁹⁷ . Mitchell, *Women of Egypt, 1924-1931*, 6.

⁹⁸ . Ibid., 5.

formulating social and artistic taste and behavior for art.⁹⁹ Refusing to accept the general scholarly view that associates popular culture in the Middle East with the category of “unmediated oral vernacular culture,” in terms of distinction between “proliterate ‘tradition’ opposed to literate modernity,” Armbrust describes the contributions to the volume of *Mass Mediation* as works addressing “‘arts and entertainments’ in their mass-mediated forms, which all refer to in everyday life as popular culture.”¹⁰⁰

Within this methodological framework, a chapter entitled *Badi’a Masabni, Aritste and Modernist* by Roberta L. Daugherty on the theme of gender and performance is of particular interest, despite the fact that Daugherty subordinates the broader question of gender in favor of formulating a central argument on the Egyptian nationalism of the 1930s as a participatory field for popular cultural icons from the worlds of journalism, performing arts, and politics.¹⁰¹ Addressing it as “the Egyptian print media’s carnival of national identity” Daugherty looks at a satirical feature *Majlis al-ta’dib*, which appeared in thirty issues of the magazine *al-Ithnayn*. In its visual and textual contents, enhanced by a combination of cartoons and both classical (*fusha*) and colloquial (*amma*) Arabic, the satirical feature acts as a carnival court where Husayn Shafiq al-Misri, the magazine’s editor in chief, appears as the court recorder together with three well-known figures, who act as the president, the judge, and the lawyer. The court is assimilated to a concert or cinema hall and the sessions are formed like concerts attended by enthusiastic audiences. Women who in parody were appointed as the presidents for the first three months of the court were ironically all accomplished figures in real life including divas from musical

⁹⁹ . Armbrust, ed., *Mass Mediations*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ . Ibid., 25.

¹⁰¹ . Roberta L. Dougherty, “Badi’a Masabni, Artiste and Modernist: The Egyptian Print Media’s Carnival of National Identity,” in Armbrust, ed., *Mass Mediations*.

world, Umm Kulthum, Munira al-Mahdiyya, Fathiyya Ahmad, and Badi'a Masabni, the movie star Bahija Hafez, and the pioneer of women's higher education Nabawiyya Musa.

Daugherty focuses on four episodes in which Badi'a Masabni appears as the president of the court along with Taha Husayn, Husayn Haykal, Mahjub Thabit, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Bishri, Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab, George Abyad, and Umm Kulthum. Daugherty points out that the chaotic and confused message of the carnival court featured in the magazine promoted al-Misri's "political agenda" that "Egyptians would never succeed in their quest to control their destiny unless they could somehow rise above the chaos of their own existence."¹⁰² Notwithstanding the call to the court to "pass judgment on a contemporary problem" and the president's "compelling case against the defendant" the court never succeeds in establishing the truth or pressuring the accused to confess. Despite the virtual nature of the court, the punishment was always inflicted on the court itself and not on the defendant. The appearance of Badi'a Masabni at the court not only was oriented to generate entertainment but also aimed at her fame and contributory role played in "the social life of contemporary society and in recognition of her innovations." Badi'a's figure was used for a nationalist agenda but her presence as a "nationalist without a nation" who "willingly" left the country which made her rich at the time of crisis, was a reference to the "best and brightest" court members' self-interest and lack of focus, who despite their unity on "certain issues of importance to the nation" are unable to succeed because of the lack of legal standing and real independence.¹⁰³

Western scholarship, in general, has a quite noticeable gap in the area of trajectory between gender and performance in Iran. A few studies which have emerged recently on gender

¹⁰² . Ibid., 264.

¹⁰³ . Ibid. 264.

and art have mostly focused on photography, fine arts, and the history of women's private and semi-public performances.¹⁰⁴ One study in particular has reflected on the trajectory between gender, public sphere, and film in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In her article "Beyond Islamic Cinema," Shiva Balaghi argues that despite the production and control of cinema by the Islamic state in Iran over the last twenty five years, filmmakers have given cinema an important role to play in mediating the power relationship between the state and society.¹⁰⁵ While the state implemented a censorship regime and a bureaucratic apparatus to both control and support filmmaking, it was ultimately unsuccessful in maintaining a hermetic control over the Iranian film industry. Undoubtedly some filmmakers have adhered to the state's guidelines for producing an Islamic cinema that is primarily propagandist, but other filmmakers have increasingly focused on the flaws and shortcomings of the government. In so doing, these filmmakers have appropriated the apparatus of cinema from the state in order to produce a powerful forum for the critique of the state itself. In an Islamic state, this critique has engendered the re-assertion of the secular and the re-articulation of nationalism.

The process itself has animated the public sphere, creating circuits for sharing knowledge, engaging debates, and constructing alternative ways of being citizens of the Iranian state. In a country where freedom of expression can be limited, Iranian cinema has become a medium in which controversial issues such as women's rights, the dysfunctional electoral system, the suppression of oppositionist groups, and the national rights of ethnic minorities are graphically depicted. Cinema, then, has become a venue through which Iranian filmmakers play

¹⁰⁴ . Anthony Shay, "Bazi-ha-ye Namayeshi (Iranian Women's Theatrical Plays)," *Research Journal* 27, no. 2 (Autumn 1995): 16-24.

¹⁰⁵ . Shiva Balaghi, "Beyond Islamic Cinema: Film and the Public Sphere in the Islamic Republic of Iran," (Outline for the Conference *Secularism, Religious Nationalism and the State: Visual Practices and Public Spheres in Comparative Perspective, Theoretical Underpinning and Methodological Basis*, American University in Beirut, April 21-23, 2005).

some role in authoring the nation. Importantly, Iran's own political history and its troubled experiences of democratization have also been reflected in Iranian cinema. Images of Marx, Che Guevara, Mossadeq, Shariati and other intellectuals and leaders appear in a number of Iranian films. Iranian cinema, then, is in a sense both a reflection of and a medium for the expression of Iranians' democratic aspirations. Explaining his view of the role of filmmakers in Iranian society today, contemporary filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf has said, "Once I thought, to achieve justice and freedom, I had to take arms, but now I think one can reach this through cultural work."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ . Ibid.

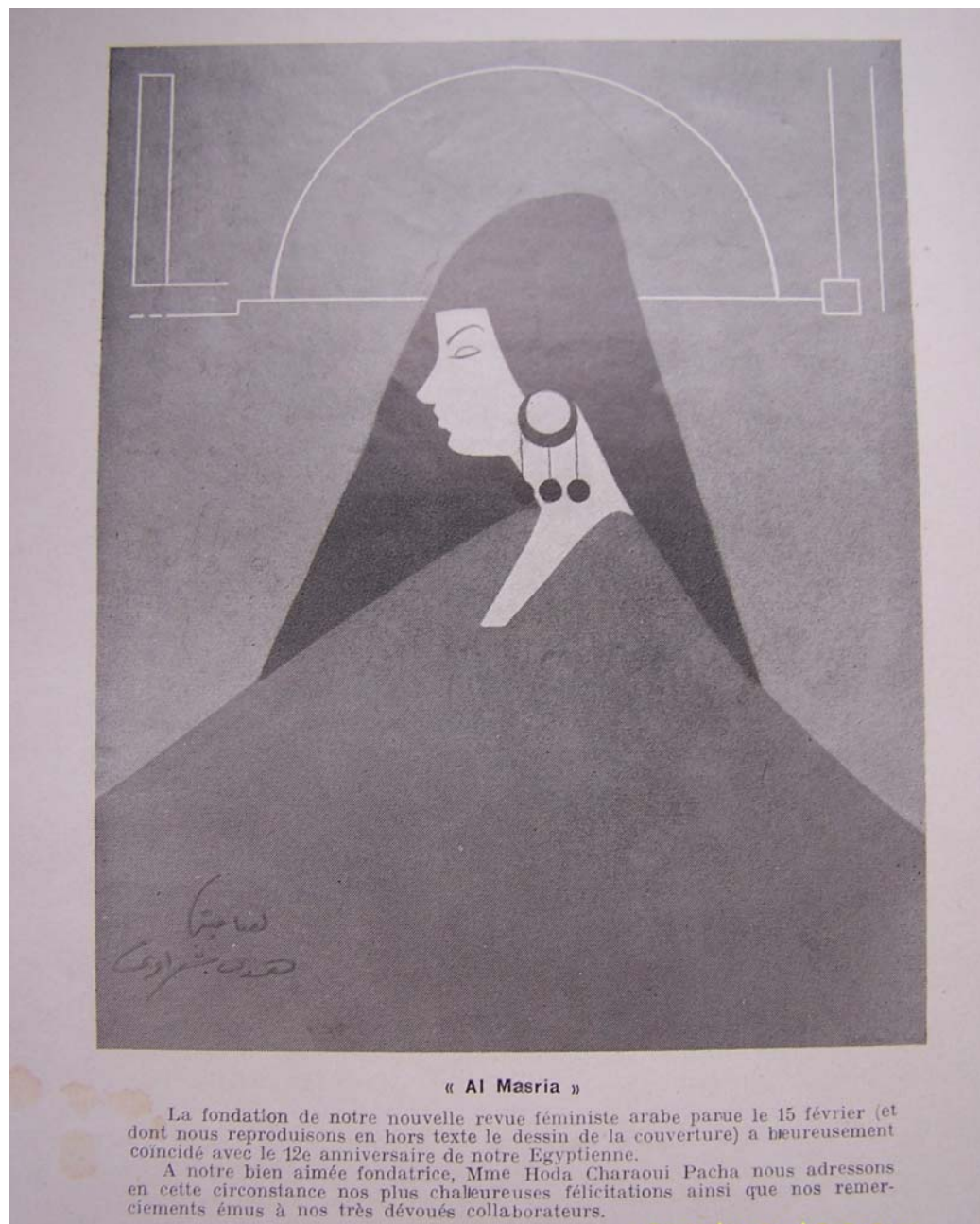


Figure 3: Design of the Cover Page of *al-Masriyya* (The Egyptian), the New Feminist Journal in Arabic Coincided with 12 Anniversary of the Foundation of the French Language Journal *L'Egyptienne* (*L'Egyptienne*, 1939).

Chapter Two

Women's Press, Performance Art, and Visual Culture

Introductory Piece

In the history of modern Iran and Egypt, the period between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries is marked by the notion of women's cultural awakening and their first public involvement in a number of cultural and political arenas. In Iran, such activities included women's contributions to the general press founded in the 1850s; the presence of the first Muslim girls in private schools founded by American missionaries in the 1870s; women's mass participation in street demonstrations and protests for the cause of the 1906-11 Constitutional Revolution; women's pioneering activism on behalf of family laws concerning polygamy, divorce, and child custody as well as their voting rights, proposed to the *Majlis* (The Parliament) in 1906; the rise of the first underground women's organization, *Anjoman-e Azadi-e Zanan* (The Women's Freedom Society) in 1907, attended by female activist Sedigeh Dowlatbadi and two daughters of Nasir a-Din Shah, Eftekhar al-Saltaneh and Taj al-Saltaneh; the establishment of the first private schools for Muslim girls, *Namus*, in 1910, founded by Tuba Azmudeh; women's boycott of foreign products, in particular textiles, during the revolution; women's mass participation in the foundation of the first national bank in 1906; and the emergence of the first weekly publication by women, *Danesh* (Knowledge) in 1910, edited by Dr. Kahal.

In Egypt, the process also began in the mid nineteenth century through the establishment of the first midwifery school by Muhammad Ali in 1832; the creation of the *Sufiyya* Girls School in 1873 and the *Sanaye* School in 1889 by Khedive Ismai'l's third wife Jashem Afet Hanum; articles in the newly emerging male press in the 1870s; the establishment of the first Egyptian public school for girls, in the 1880s; the opening of a salon for literary and political debates in

the 1880s by Princess Nazli Fazil, niece of Khedive Isma'il; publication of the first biographical dictionaries of women in 1880s and 1890s by Maryam al-Nahhas and Zaynab Fawwaz; attending the first women's salon in the 1890s, founded by Eugenie Le Brun, and discussing veiling and seclusion; the publication of the first women's press, *al-Fatah* (The Young Girl) in 1892 by Hind Nawfal; founding of the American College for Girls in 1909; creation of the first teachers' training schools for women in the 1910s; and women's participation in the 1919 anti-British Revolution.

Women's activities in the public spheres of press, education, and salons at the turn of the century were part of a larger context of modernist reforms including the discourse and debates surrounding the question of woman and feminist consciousness. In Iran, Mirza 'Abd al-Hosayn Khan Kermani and Bibi Khanom Astarabadi, and in Egypt, 'Aiysha al-Taymuriyya and Qasim Amin placed that discourse for the first time at the center of their writings and publications.¹⁰⁷ Whether through Islamic modernism or secular nationalism, the discourse of women's awakening had a substantial tie with education and women's entry into the world of the printing press at the turn of the century. Writing was an act of transgression generating a public presence for women who were confined to domestic life. Within cultures where women's sound and voice were silenced and considered *'awreh* (hidden/dealing with one's private honor), the act of writing offered possibilities for women to raise their voices and to be heard. Scholars have associated writing with the act of unveiling, and in the case of Iran and Egypt the first attempts at taking off the face coverings coincided with women's entrance into the world of press and

¹⁰⁷ . Cameron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2002), 27, 35; Hoda Elsadda and Emad Abu-Ghazi, *Significant Moments in the History of Egyptian Women*, vol. 1, trans. Hala Kamal (Cairo: National Council for Women, 2003), 41-4, 59-63.

education.¹⁰⁸ At the turn of the century, the women's press in Iran and Egypt mostly included conservative contents pertaining to women's household responsibilities, child care, and health problems, although a few – such as *Jahan-e Zanan* (Women's World) edited by Fakhr Afagh Parsa, and *Zaban-e Zanan* (literary Women's Tongue) edited by Sedigheh Dowlatabadi in Iran – attempted to break out of these limits. *Jahan-e Zanan* was banned from publishing after the fifth issue because of its “radical” content, which intended to familiarize women with the history of women's struggles while giving them insights on how to empower themselves. Parsa became the first Iranian woman journalist to be sent into exile.¹⁰⁹ *Zaban-e Zanan* also went through censorship struggles during its first discontinuous short phase in the early 1920s.

As both Iran and Egypt came out of their primary phase of nationalistic and revolutionary struggles for independence, the press in Egypt and Iran, following Benedict Anderson's theory of “imagined communities,” played a vital role in both reflecting and constructing an identity as a modern nation.¹¹⁰ During a period of chaos under the last Qajar shah, Ahmad Shah (1917-1925), Iran went through a phase of major transformations in military reform, defeat of tribal rebellions, and the foundation of a secular state, with Reza Pahlavi as the prime minister and the head of the military. He finally claimed the throne in 1925. After the 1919 Revolution, Egypt became a constitutional monarchy in 1923 under King Fuad, and in 1924 *Wafdist* leader Sa'd Zaghlul was elected prime minister. Egypt changed from a colonial to a semi-colonial country.

Both in Iran and Egypt during the interwar period, the middle class expanded and literacy

¹⁰⁸ . Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*; Farzaneh Milani, *Words and Veils: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁹ . Gholam Khiabany and Annabelle Sreberny, “The Women's Press in Contemporary Iran: Engendering the Public Sphere,” in *Women and Media in the Middle East: Power Through Self-Expression*, ed. Naomi Sakr (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 15-38.

¹¹⁰ . Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

increased. The number of governmental schools for girls grew, producing more female graduates. Women were also allowed to go to university. With veiling and seclusion in decline, women began to have a more visible presence in such public spaces as streets, public transportation, schools, clubs, societies, charities, entertainment districts, and regional and international conferences. Women's movements expanded into independent and semi-independent visible and active organizations. The number of journals published by women increased, changing both their contents (editorials, letters to editors, art pages) and styles (the addition of illustrations). In Iran thirteen and in Egypt fifteen journals were in circulation.¹¹¹ A decade later, in the 1930s, quarters and streets of major cities both in Iran and Egypt became sites for public entertainment – events such as concerts, art exhibits, films, night club dances, and theatrical performances, creating spectacles in the city. Participation of men (and women) across the social spectrum in public life through education, entertainment, and politics contributed to the proliferation of a national visual culture shared by different social classes. Women's contributions as writers and artists in the rise and spread of such textual and visual cultures during these two decades were significant. Scholarship in the area of women's contribution to this culture has pointed out different directions.¹¹² Recent studies have gone

¹¹¹ . Sediqeh Babran, *Seyr-e Tarikhi Nashriyat Zanan dar Iran-e Moa'ser: Nashriyat Vijeh Zanan (Historical Development of Women's Press in Contemporary Iran: Women's Specialized Journals)* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Roshangaran wa Motalea't-e Zanan, 2002); Cole, "Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt."

¹¹² . On Iran see Badr ol-Molouk Bamdad, *Zan-e Irani az Inqilab-e Mashrutiat ta Inqilab-e Sefid (Iranian Woman from Constitutional Revolution to the White Revolution)*, vol. 1, (Tehran: Inb-e Sina, 1968); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *The Story of the Daughters of Quchan: Gender and National Memory in Iranian History* (Syracus: Syracuse University Press, 1998); On Egypt see Ebrahim 'Abduh, and Doria Shafiq, eds. *Tatawar al-Nahda al-Niwaiyya fi Misr: Min 'Ahd Mohammad 'Ali ila 'Ahd al-Faruq (The Evolution of Woman's Movement in Egypt: From Mohammad Ali to the Time of Faruq)* (Cairo: Maktab' al-Adab bil Jamamin, 1945); Al-Sibki, Bayumi and D. Amal Kamil, *Al-Haraka' al-Nisaiyy fi Misr: Ma beyn al-Thuratein, 1919 wa 1952 (Women's Movement in Egypt: Between Two Revolutions, 1919 and 1952)* (Cairo: Matba' al-Haiya' al-Misriyya al-'Ama' lil Kitab, 1986); Latifa' Mohammed Salim, *Al-Mar'a al-Misriyya wa al-Ta'iy al-ijtimai', 1919-1945 (Egyptian Women and social Change, 1919-1945)* (Cairo: Al-Haia' al-Misriyya al-'Ama lil Kitab, 1984); Cynthia Nelson, *Doria Shafik, Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996).

beyond a culture of political and educational activism, addressing the questions of oral and visual cultures in women's activities.¹¹³

Cameron Michael Amin has placed the question of the emergence of the modern Iranian woman within the time span of 1865 and 1946. Amin has argued that although the “renewal movement” during the Qajar dynasty and the 1906-11 Constitutional Revolution played important roles in opening the path for the emergence of a discourse on the question of modern Iranian woman, it was the state feminism of Reza Shah Pahlavi after the 1936-41 women's awakening project that created “key moments” of opportunities in employment and education for women. It was the process of becoming free from the discursive as well as the practice of a “male guardianship” that contributed to the enlightenment of that historical moment. According to Amin, the medium for enforcement of such “a particular vision of the modern Iranian woman” was the pages of the Iranian popular press.¹¹⁴ Beth Baron has also pointed out the importance of photography as a modern medium used by the Egyptian Nationalists in the construction of nation during the 1920s and 30s. Her book, *Egypt as a Woman*, has traced the symbolic iconography of woman used by Egyptian artists, journalists, and nationalists to construct Egypt as a nation.¹¹⁵

Using Jurgen Habermas's terms “rational communication” system or “rational-critical” discourse for the women's press during the interwar period, we can expand the study of the woman question in Iran and Egypt within the theme of the public sphere as a site of debates

¹¹³ . On Iran see Shay, “Bazi-ha-ye Namayeshi (Iranian Women's Theatrical Plays);” I. Emami, “The Evolution of Traditional Theatre and the Development of Modern Theatre in Iran” (PhD diss., University of Edinburg, 1987); On Egypt see van Nieuwkerk, “A Trade Like Any Other”; Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt*; Sherifa Zuhur, *Colors of Enchantment: Theater, Dance, Music, and the Visual Arts of the Middle East* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001).

¹¹⁴ . Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 1.

¹¹⁵ . Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

about issues of “common concern.”¹¹⁶ Habermas’s concept of the public sphere as a “venue of emancipation, power of reason, political participation, civil society, and democracy” has further been developed by critical narratives which attempted to include such excluded identities as women, workers, non-white racial groups, and religious minorities in that discourse.¹¹⁷ This body of literature helps us to give context to women’s roles and their subject positions during the culturally and politically changing period of the interwar in Iran and Egypt. Women’s press and those who dedicated pages or columns of their journals to *zanan* (women in Persian) or *al-sayyidat* (women in Arabic) addressed issues concerning women from a gendered point of view because of many socio-political and religious restrictions. However, the public sphere as a site of performance for constructing identities itself constitutes power and domination, concealing subjugation of undermined identities.¹¹⁸ This construct helps us then to understand how women’s narrative discourse and performative embodiments produced gender both in its oppressive and subversive definitions.

In Habermas’s theory of the public sphere, it is publicness, or public opinion, which transforms an individual or a group into an historical agent.¹¹⁹ Habermas, however, did not

¹¹⁶ . Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Spheres*.

¹¹⁷ . For critiques of Habermas on essentializing the citizen in terms of gender and race see note 45 in chapter one.

¹¹⁸ . The notion of the public sphere as a site of subjugation addresses the production of power and hierarchies of difference based on inclusion and exclusion. For further readings on this topic see Alev Cinar, “The Public, the Body, and the Nation: Negotiating a Place for Islam in Secular Spaces in Turkey” (Paper presented at Cairo Workshop, *Gendering Urban Space in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia*, American University in Cairo, February 26-27, 2005); Joan Landes, “The Public and the Private Sphere, A Feminist Reconsideration” in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1995), 91-116; Lauren Berlant, “National Brands/National Body: Imitation of Life” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 173-208; Craig Calhoun, “Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 1-48; Michael Warner, “The Mass Public and The Mass Subject” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 377-401.

¹¹⁹ . Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Spheres*.

address the central role that visibility, images, and performance play in the creation of historical actors and “a human existence into a meaningful political agent.”¹²⁰ The fields of art history, film studies, and performance or “embodied practices” have contributed enormously in making historians conscious of the significance of the image in historical analysis. The increase in women’s presence in public spaces as a practice, which could include the physical space of the stage or the virtual site of the press, is an example of visibility and visible performance.¹²¹

Conscious or unconscious performance has been considered as the way to construct identities. Performing spectatorship and being part of the spectacle are both integral to the expression of the “new modes of identity” formation. Scholars in the field of public space, social order, and gender have produced a number of studies on the issue of the double “desire to see and be seen... to express one’s sense of social position.” Seeing oneself, seeing each other, and being seen by others are part of a performative act through which historical actors have been able to understand their societies and their social order, and interact with them as well.¹²²

¹²⁰ . Alev Cinar, Srirupa Roy, and Maha Yahya have pointed out the “unexplored sites” wherein the public sphere is formed and transformed. They state, “... the public sphere is not only constituted verbally through acts of debate and deliberation but also visually through performative acts and material practices.” (Outline for Conference on *Secularism, Religious Nationalism, and the State: Visual Practices in the Public Sphere in Comparative Perspective, Theoretical Underpinning and Methodological Basis*, American University in Beirut, April 2005). For further studies on the subject of public sphere as a formation of visual and performative site see Joan Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender Representation and Revolution in Eighteenth Century France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Princeton University Press, 2001). For a feminist study of the subject see Judith Butler, *Gender Performance: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

¹²¹ . Harry Harootunian, *History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

¹²² . I would like to acknowledge Dr. Denise Davidson for her enlightening article “Making Society ‘Legible’: People-Watching in Paris after the Revolution,” *French History* 16, no. 30 (2002): 299-322. The paper brought to my attention the concept of “double desire” in a performative act and the notion of “active” denomination of “those on display.” Such an argument has been articulated by recent scholars in the field of visual and performative arts, including film studies, in opposition to the earlier studies, which considered “being seen” as an act of objectification in particular in reference to women. The term “double desire” refers to simultaneous act of seeing and being seen, being viewers and those on display, and performing spectatorship and being part of the spectacle. See also Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989); Eva Lajer-Bucharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques Louis David after the Terror* (New Haven: Yale

Modernity, Visibility, and the Women's Press in Iran

In the 1920s, the women's printing press in Iran flourished, while only three of the thirteen interwar journals were published during the 1930s. Sa'd Zaghlul's vision of modernization projects for Egypt was partly disrupted by the British intervention, but Reza Pahlavi's dream of modernization of Iran went along with Europeans' power to implement regulations and control over the press, including women's journals. Female editors, therefore, covered the pages of their journals with articles and subjects which addressed the earlier questions of *khanehdari* (housekeeping), *behdasht-e manzel* (household cleaning), and *tarbiat-e atfal* (children's education), but at the same time generated shifts by connecting those subjects to topics relevant to the early twentieth century's modernist and secular appeal, such as the *mohit-e zist* (environment), *madreseh mo'alemi wa parastari* (teaching and nursing training colleges), and *emteiaz-e manteqi-e 'elm* (rational advantages of science). Their portrayal of the images of themselves (and the others) as the new women of Iran, seen by themselves as well as the others, resembled what Joan Scott has called "paradoxes of feminism," an image (and a practice) of womanhood living in the past, but at the same time imagining in the future.¹²³

A few journals, like *'Alam-e Neswan* (The World of Women) and *Jami'at Neswan-e Watankhah* (The League of Patriotic Women) structured their textual contents into theatrical plays, using the framework of an advertisement, and including photographs. Many of these articles referred to European advancement in science and its impact on the formation of equal human rights within the society, both for men and women. They mostly included Iran among

University Press, 1999); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

¹²³ . Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

those advancing on the progressive path, although very slowly. '*Elm* (Science) also took on a practical meaning for assisting women in their daily life routines instead of being reserved for an exclusive group of talented individuals.¹²⁴ The journal of the *Jami'at Neswan-e Watankhah* referred to Marie Currie as the pioneering embodiment of womanhood and science. The article, however, stated that many other female workers should also be recognized for their achievements like Marie Curie.¹²⁵

Using theatrical skits in the form of a dialogue, *Jam'iat Neswan-e Watankhah* included a number of issues relevant to the oppression as well as the empowerment of women in Iran. In an introduction to one of these skits, the writer stated that, "the main purpose of this play is to demonstrate women's oppression and men's ruthless and faked expression of love for women (*'eshghe dorooghin*) who are teachers of the nation's children and the foundations of our civilization."¹²⁶ The topics were very similar to personal stories told at the beginning of each article or letters sent by the readers, which in a way blurred the distinctive line between theatrical fiction and real life. However, the piece was broken down into several sections, like several skits within a theatrical play. In an article entitled *musiqi* (music), the author praised music as *fann-e beynalmelali* (an international science/technique), which is able, like poems, to express the best nationalistic feelings. While world progress also brought development of music, in Iran, as with other *fannha*, music did not enjoy advancement and remained isolated from musical developments in other countries. The author then referred to Colonel Ali Naqi Vaziri, as the pioneer of the advancement of music in Iran. He not only elevated the position of Iranians in

¹²⁴ . *Jami'at Neswan-e Watankhah*: (1923): 45-50.

¹²⁵ . Ibid.

¹²⁶ . Ibid., 1, no.2 (1923), pp. 5, 14-8.

this matter, but also provided music lovers all around the world with a great *tohfeh* (gift).¹²⁷ Dance became the topic of several debates, which either considered it as a form of sport¹²⁸ or questioned the association of women singers with fallen women, a label not attached to men who enjoy the beauty of female voice and face. “*Aya taqdir-e zan ast ya anha*” (“Is it woman’s fault or theirs”) was the concluding phrase of the article.¹²⁹ Writing about cinema became limited to addressing rules and regulations regarding purchasing of the ticket and the audience’s behavior.¹³⁰

Photographs included in *Jami’at Neswan-e Watankhah*, *‘Alam-e Neswan*, and *Payk-e Sa’adat-e Neswan* ((The Messenger of the Women’s Happiness) were of low print quality. *Rooznameh Ayandeh Iran* (The Newspaper of the Future of Iran), produced by Mr. Adel and his well-known poet wife, Fakhr Arqoun, was more advanced in the area of visuals, incorporating photographs of girls who graduated from different schools, of the opening ceremony of the *Kanoun Banovan-e Iran* (The Center of Iranian Ladies) headed by Shah’s daughter Ashraf Pahlavi, and the board members of the *Kanoun*’s first library. Women and their cause were also publicized both in visual and textual forms on the paper’s cover, which depicted a woman carrying a flag pointing to the horizon, where the sun was rising. The text read: *siasi, adabi, ejtemai’i, tarafdār-e neswan* (political, literary, social, pro-women). The pages of *Ayandeh Iran* became an important place for advertisements, which conveyed women’s achievements in professional fields, especially medicine. Ads by women doctors who had finished their studies

¹²⁷ . *‘Alam-e Neswan*, 5, no. 2 (1924): 2-3.

¹²⁸ . *Ibid.*, 7, no. 8 (1927): 6-7.

¹²⁹ . *Ibid.*, 7, no. 9 (1927), 7.

¹³⁰ . *Ibid.*, 5, no. 3 (1925),

abroad and were back home to help their countrywomen were numerous. In addition to obtaining significance as a medium through which women were able to claim unconventional professions for themselves, advertisement also followed its commercial purpose in selling the products of the latest fashion trends, such as hats, shoes, and socks, to the newly emerged unveiled Iranian *zan-e emrouzi* (the New Woman).¹³¹

Other journals introduced a visual imaginary of accomplished women, from around the world. Short biographical pieces about foreign as well as Iranian women were included in the pages of *Dokhtaran-e Iran* (The Daughters of Iran) on different occasions. While the journal invited women like Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, who inaugurated the editor on the selection of the journal's name, it also published sketches of many accomplished women like the French heroine, Jean d'Arc, the minister of health in the Ottoman Empire, Adibeh Khanom, and famous Iranian historical female figures such as Gordafarid, Pourandokht, Parshad, Tahmineh, Jamal al-Nesa, and Jahan Khonom to provide a *sarmashq* (role model) for Iranian girls.¹³² A few photographs also accompanied some biographies. *Jami'at Neswan-e Watankhah* also included a short story about Italian Renaissance queen Cathrine de Medici and a eulogy written on the sudden death of the editor of the journal, Mohtaram Eskandari. Referring to Eskandari as a moral, kind, and responsible mother, the essay also praised her pioneering role as an effective intellectual and a progressive teacher. The eulogy also pointed out Ms. Eskandari's nationalist orientation, as shown by her organizing a conference to promote Iranian *kalaha-ye watani* (national products) especially textiles, while boycotting foreign luxury goods. The eulogy was delivered by the new

¹³¹ . *Ayandeh Iran*, 10, no. 12 (1936).

¹³² . *Dokhtaran-e Iran*, 1, no. 1 (1931-2): 19, 21; *Ibid.*, 1 no. 3 (1932): 19.

editor, Noor al-Hoda Manganeh, who also appraised the high status of Ms. Eskandari within the community of women for her tireless work on behalf of women's advancement.¹³³

Zan wa Taraqqi (Woman and Progress)

Women journalists also used longer articles to present an image of their intellectual reflective "selves." In an article entitled *Kongrreh Neswan-e Sharq* (The Congress of Women of the East), *Payk-e Sa'adat-e Neswan* first blamed the authorities, who received the Congress's invitation and did not care about including women from *Peyk-e Sa'adat* in the event. On a general note, however, the journal praised the idea of having such a congress in India in 1930 because women in the East, in particular peasant women, shared common issues and struggles. According to the writer, these women not only had to deal with internal and external oppressions by their husbands and foreign landowners, but also had to confront superstitions, traditional rituals, and conservative ways of thinking. Thus, if the Congress highlights these issues and tries to find solutions to these problems, it will be welcomed by women. Otherwise it will fail to create solidarity between its organizers and women around the world.¹³⁴ Referring to the images of women through the significant roles they played in many events, national and international, became central to the editors and contributors of these journals. In fact, by showcasing women's significant place within these events, the women's press was able to create a consciousness-raising debate about a number of issues which were outside the conventional frame of family, house, and children.

Writing about women workers and the differences in the meaning of work for them and women of upper class families gave an incentive for the writer of *Payk-e Sa'adat-e Neswan* to

¹³³ . *Jami'at Neswan-e Watankhah* 1, no. 5/6: 1-4.

¹³⁴ . *Peyk-e Sa'adat-e Neswan* 2, no. 2 (1930): 1-3.

address the laws that prevented women workers from obtaining educational training. According to this law, only those who were enrolled in school on a continuous basis, without breaks, could pass the exam and obtain a diploma.¹³⁵ Women's work was tied to the economic problems of the country, according to Mansoureh Afshar, the editor of *Jami'at Neswan-e Watankhah*. She forwarded a letter to the *Majlis* (The Parliament) and its representatives asking them to provide scholarships so that poor girls and women could be sent to Egypt or Beirut to be trained as obstetricians. In women's eyes, Iran was still passing through its revolutionary phase.¹³⁶ Although the government had opened thirty-five schools for girls so far, reform in the area of education for women was a major gap. Girls' schools today needed a structural reform in their teaching methods and materials in order to prepare women for the challenges of the future, a task that teachers with little training and knowledge could not provide.¹³⁷ In the pursuit of *tamadon-e 'elmi* (scientific civilization), change tied to social transformation would be brought to women's lives.¹³⁸

'*Alam-e Neswan* reported on the visit to the *Majlis*, which women teachers of the American school had organized. Effat Khanom Sami'yan praised American teachers' efforts in this regard but at the same time expressed her deepest feelings of sadness that as a *zan-e Irani* (an Iranian woman) she was unable to attain such an accomplishment. She addressed those who work towards the progress of this country that the only way leading to *taraqqi* (progress) is to raise individuals cared for by mothers who did not follow superstitious beliefs. Effat Khanom

¹³⁵ . Ibid., 4-6.

¹³⁶ . *Jami'at Neswan-e Watankhah* 2, no. 9 (1924): 11-2.

¹³⁷ . '*Alam-e Neswan* 4, no. 2 (1923): 6-7.

¹³⁸ . *Peyk-e Sa'adat-e Neswan* 2, no. 2 (1930): 4-9.

urged the Parliament's representatives to give back women their rights and show their patriotism by giving educated women a place – the audiences' seats in the *Majlis*, so they could listen to the debates.¹³⁹

Performing spectatorship and being part of the spectacle through the press included covering accomplishments by women on a wider scale. Both on the pages of the press and in real life, these women set out to display and imagine possibilities that once seemed unattainable. 'Alam-e Neswan included part of an article from a journal written by an English woman about Egyptian women's educational achievements. The numbers of primary, secondary, and technical schools were increasing in Egypt with the support of King Fuad. Most of them were state schools, which not only trained future female teachers for the country but also helped women achieve the ability to support themselves. Each school had built a library, a dormitory, and a health center on its campus and maintained a kitchen for providing lunch. Physical training and sports were central to the curriculum.¹⁴⁰

Another report pertained to the political activities of Munira Thabit in the area of women's legal right to education, marriage, and work. The report summarized an interview that *al-Hilal* had conducted with Munira, the chair of the Egyptian Women's Organization. It contained a short sketch about Munira's earlier education in Italian and French schools in Cairo and her recent membership in Zaghlul's *Wafd* Party. Munira campaigned for equal rights for women in all areas. She believed that Egyptian women had accomplished much and eliminated many obstacles despite their very recent history of seclusion and veiling. They had earned the right to vote and shared many public positions with men. Munira also stated that at the present,

¹³⁹ . 'Alam-e Neswan 7, no. 5 (1927): 171-3.

¹⁴⁰ . 'Alam-e Neswan 4, no. 6 (1924): 21-3.

veiling in Egypt did not exist and that women in general had welcomed the removal of the veil despite the fact that some men were still in doubt about this courageous act by women.¹⁴¹ In another report '*Alam-e Neswan* gave news about an Egyptian woman, Mohtarameh Shakir, who in a contest among Arab students had won the best speech prize at the American School in Beirut. Ms. Shakir was the first Muslim woman to win that prize with her speech entitled *Noor ra beanha (Neswan) Neshan Bedahid* (Show them (Women) the Light), which pertained to the training and education necessary for the advancement of Muslim women. Ms. Shakir was the secretary of the Egyptian Feminist Union and she was named as a special student in the school of arts and sciences in Cairo.¹⁴²

'*Alam-e Neswan* also reported from Turkey about the installation of a sculpture in Istanbul in honor of women's advancements, with one side depicting victorious soldiers and on the other a veiled woman from whom another woman rises, unveiled and free of chains.¹⁴³ The story about the veil was also covered in another report by '*Alam-e Neswan*, where forced unveiling with life imprisonment as the punishment for resisting was ordered for the city of Tarabuzen. The legal announcement read: "*hijab* is against health and the freedom to live and work for women."¹⁴⁴ News about Turkey also included secular laws passed in favor of women such as abolition of the rights of polygamy and unilateral divorce for men. The writer wrote: "This great movement has opened a new day in the world of Eastern women." The passing of the law, which was welcomed enormously by Turkish women despite the unhappiness of men,

¹⁴¹ . Ibid., 6, no. 4 (1926): 31-4.

¹⁴² . Ibid., 5, no. 5 (1935): 12-3.

¹⁴³ . Ibid., 7, no. 6 (1927): 210.

¹⁴⁴ . Ibid., 7, no. 4 (1927): 160.

has brought equal rights for women in the area of divorce as well. This and other progressive achievements have been the outcomes of the 1908 nationalist Turkish revolution, which planted the seed of self-consciousness in Turkish women. The journal added: “they say that since women began to wear clothes modeled on the latest fashion from Paris, polygamy was ended because men could not afford the high prices of those outfits.”¹⁴⁵

Japan also provided a rich source for Iranian women journalists to make themselves seen in the public sphere through the press. The increase in the number of schools and the state’s mandatory education for girls thirty-five years before had resulted in Japanese women now entering the worlds of business, factories, offices, and universities. Women’s activities in many political and labor parties which a couple of years ago were banned have become a source of inspiration and imitation for many women around the world, Iranian women in particular, who had been limited to only work in education. The writer wanted the comparison to make readers “come to their senses and be awakened from that comfortable sleep.”¹⁴⁶ China also offered imaginative sources of major advancements for women. News from China presented Soumi Najnik, the first female judge who had worked toward reforms in women’s status. Soumi participated in the Chinese Revolution of 1911 to overthrow the Manchu dynasty. She then traveled to Paris to obtain her doctoral degree, but returned to China in 1917 to assist in the improvement of the country. She believed that Chinese women should stand up and demand equal rights with men in education, work, and political affairs. She was an expert in international law and a defender of democracy.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ . Ibid., 6, no. 6 (1926): 25-6.

¹⁴⁶ . Ibid., 5, no. 6 (1925): 17-9; Ibid., 7, no. 3 (1926): 90-1.

¹⁴⁷ . Ibid., 7, no. 3 (1926): 93-8.

The short congratulatory note by '*Alam-e Neswan* to the editor of *Payk-e Sa'adat-e Neswan* intended to break away from traditional standards of press editorials and claim a renewed female identity.¹⁴⁸ Like the content of the journal, this acknowledgment made the spectacle of women's *taraqqi* a public and a visible task. When Roshanak Nowdoust, the editor of *Payk-e Sa'adat-e Neswan*, opened the first girls' school in the northern city of Rasht in 1917, many schools in other towns were under attack by conservative authorities. Roshanak was resilient and extended her activities by founding *Jami'at Payk-e Sa'adat-e Neswan* (The Association of the Messenger of Women's Happiness) in 1923. The association, with its library, reading programs, primary and adult schools, and lectures had enlightened people about women's role in the society. The journal presented many public images of women. In reaching out to women, *Jami'at Payk-e Sa'adat-e Neswan* also founded a pioneering theatre company which took theatre out of the exclusive hands of men. The company inaugurated its first production in Oloush Beik *tamashakhaneh* (theatre-hall) in 1923 with the play '*Arousi* (The Wedding) or *Dokhtar Foroushi* (The Selling of a Girl) in five acts.¹⁴⁹

In 1927 in an article published in '*Alam-e Neswan*, Khanom Bawaseqi presented woman journalist, teacher, and artist Sediqeh Dowlatabadi as a vivid and lively example of the presence of Iranian women in the forefront of a struggle unacknowledged by many.¹⁵⁰ Dowlatabadi founded *Zaban-e Zanan* (literally the Tongue but more idiomatically "The Language of Women") in 1919 in the city of Isfahan. *Zaban-e Zanan* began by addressing women's issues

¹⁴⁸ . Ibid., 7, no. 12 (1927): 444.

¹⁴⁹ . Azadeh Bizar Guity, "Amouzeshe-e Zanan dar Negahi beh Fa'aliyyathay-e Roshanak Nowdoust (Women's Education through a Look at the Activism of Roshanak Nowdoust)," in *Fasl-e Zanan (The Season of Women)*, vol. 3, eds. Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani and Firouzeh Mohajer (Tehran: Nashr-e Tose'eh, 2003), 54-9.

¹⁵⁰ . '*Alam-e Neswan*, 7, no. 6 (1927): 213-6.

but slowly moved to the larger arena of politics from the point of view of women. Dowlatabadi was raised in a religious family but was able to found the first women's press staffed completely by women in 1919, to establish the first girls' school and the first women's association in Isfahan, to receive an advanced degree in education from the Sorbonne in Paris, to publish numerous articles in European journals and give several lectures, to participate in the International Congress of Women in Paris in 1926 as the representative of Iranian women, to obtain the position of general inspector of girls' schools in 1929, and to become the president of *Kanoon Banovan-e Iran* (The Iranian Women's Center) in 1937.¹⁵¹ As journalists, educators and artists, women like Nowdoust and Dowlatabadi embodied and publicized images of an identity inspired by examples from the West as well as the East. This identity was constantly being transformed, and faced complex challenges. Individuals, groups, and society interacted.

Women, Visibility, and Journalism in Egypt

The lack of a strong state in Egypt during the interwar period opened much independent space for multi-directional forms of the women's press to emerge. Factions of the government resented the presence of British in the country and did not completely co-operate with either the national government or the foreign authorities. The result was the emergence of a public space embedded with controversies, confusions, and diversities, both on the political and the cultural levels. It was in this environment that the theatre actress, Fatima Ruz al Yusuf, in reaction to the criticism which appeared in a journal regarding her theatrical performance, suggested that women need their own press in the area of performing arts. Ruz al Yusuf was a Lebanese living in Egypt. Her journal mixed a number of political issues with news from the world of

¹⁵¹ . San'ati and Najmabadi, eds., *Sediqeh Dowlatabadi (Sediqeh Dowlatabadi)*, 636-8; Maryam Fathi, ed., *Kanoon Banovan-e Iran: Ba Rouykardi be Rishehay-e Tarikhi Harkathay-e Zanan dar Iran (The Iranian Women's Center: A Look at the Historical Roots of Women's Activities in Iran)* (Tehran: Moa'seseh Motale'at-e Tarikh-e Mo'aser Iran, 2004).

entertainment, theatre, and cinema. The nationalist and anti-British agenda of the journal at times placed *Ruz al-Yusuf* in an anti-governmental position, fighting both against King Fuad and leader of the *Wafd* Party Mustafa al-Nahhas.¹⁵²

The publication of *Ruz al-Yusuf* and a number of other performing arts journals ran by women was the child of that initial reaction of the actress to critics. It was in these art, as well as non-art, journals that the heterogeneous group of avant-garde Egyptian women writers put themselves on display during the 1920s and 30s. These women of the press constantly wrote about each other in detail, and displayed visual images of their identities, covering an entire spectrum of their activities. *Al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* (the Egyptian Woman) and *Ruz al-Yusuf* announced the publication of the Egyptian Feminist Union's new journal *L'Égyptienne (al-Misriyya)*. *Al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* (the Women's Awakening) described the mission of the new journal – to elevate women's social and artistic status - and also pointed out the photographic portraits of Khedive Abbas Hilmi II's mother and the French writer and patron Juliette Adam printed in *L'Égyptienne*'s first issue.¹⁵³ *Al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* and *Ruz al-Yusuf* often printed portrait photographs of pioneering women, including Labiba Ahmad and Ruz al-Yusuf, the editors of the journals. A brief biographical note describing the individual's accomplishments accompanied each illustration.

Al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya published Nabawia Musa's photograph, pointing out her former position as a school inspector for the ministry of education. It then praised Nabawia's bravery and pioneering role as the first woman in the history of the Egyptian courts to defend herself in

¹⁵² . Elsadda and Abu-Ghazi, *Significant Moments in the History of Egyptian Women*, 110.

¹⁵³ . *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* 6 (15 February 1925): 113; *Ruz al-Yusuf* 1 (12 May 1926): 7.

person when charges were brought against her.¹⁵⁴ Another story referred to Hoda Sha'rawi's visit to the studio of the well-known Egyptian sculptor Mahmoud Mokhtar in *Antikkhaneh* street, to purchase a sculpture for LE 200 Egyptian Pounds. Hoda's purchase was referred to as the "sensitivity of a beautiful nation" and she was praised for her gesture as being a "true nationalist."¹⁵⁵ *Al-Mihrajan* (The Festival) dedicated a whole page to Hoda Sha'rawi's intention to write her life story, which would emphasize women's awakening and such key female and male personalities as Princess Nazli, Bahithat al-Badiya, Rifa'a al-Tahtawi and Qasim Amin. The news itself appeared as a brief biographical page about Hoda's life, from her family's social and political position to her pioneering role in the foundation of the Egyptian Feminist Union.¹⁵⁶

Longer articles also appeared, reporting women's presence at conferences and public events and printing their speeches, such as May Ziada's speech at the 1925 conference on family, and her talk at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the journal *al-Muqtataf*.¹⁵⁷ *Al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* published a series of communications between May Ziada and Bahithat al-Badiya, as well as a poem dedicated to Badiya by Nabawia Musa.¹⁵⁸ The *Akhbar wa Hawadith* (the News and Events) page of *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* reported on its annual opening ceremony in 1925, held at al-Uzbakiyya Garden. Nabawia Musa was the keynote speaker, and a group of female school principals attended.¹⁵⁹ *Al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* printed a letter addressed to its editor Labiba Ahmed from Rose Haddad, the editor of *al-Sayyidat wa al-Rijal* (Ladies and

¹⁵⁴ . *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* 8 (March 1930): 94.

¹⁵⁵ . Ibid., 8 (January 1930): 9.

¹⁵⁶ . *al-Mihrajan* 1 (15 December 1937): 74-6.

¹⁵⁷ . *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* 6 (15 May 1925): 269-70; *Ruz al-Yusuf*, 1 (12 May 1926): 8.

¹⁵⁸ . *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* 8 (15 January 1927): 30-4; Ibid., 6 (15 December 1925): 527.

¹⁵⁹ . *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* 6 (15 May 1925): 276-79.

Gentlemen) and sister of Farah Antun. Haddad congratulated *al-Nahda* on its fifth year of publication and praised its message encouraging women's participation in public activities to establish a "connection among women of the East." Haddad thought this connection might strengthen resistance to European efforts to recover war damages from Arab and Eastern countries. The one page "*risala*" (the article) incorporated a photograph of Rose Haddad.¹⁶⁰

Photographs of recent female graduates and those who entered professional fields, including *al-Fann (Art)* were often published and their subjects were praised for their accomplishments.¹⁶¹ Photographs of Labiba Ahmad, the editor of *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya*, were printed on several occasions, from her pose in front of Masjid al-Quds (Dome of the Rock) on her way to Mecca to an image of her with Ali Bey Kemal, brother of the nationalist *Watani* Party founder Mustafa Bey Kemal. The photograph, which also included the image of an orphaned child, was printed on the occasion of the death of Ali Bey Kemal, with a reference to Labiba as the future educator of the girl. *Al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* also published a two-page article by Ibrahim Abd al Latif Naim on Ahmad's efforts in advancing women's education as well as her morals, strength, and pious nature.¹⁶²

Fashioning *al-Jism (The Body)*, Refining *al-Nafs (The Self)*

The efforts of these women in the press to produce knowledge, in both its textual and visual forms, about activities of other women, reflect their consciousness about society's physical and moral boundaries regarding the status of women and the role women could play in challenging that status in public spaces. Coming from diverse religious, class, and cultural

¹⁶⁰ . *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* 5 (February 1927): 65.

¹⁶¹ . *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* 6 (15 June 1925): 304; *al-Hisan* 8 (25 January 1933): 1.

¹⁶² . *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* 5 (February 1927): 67; *Ibid.*, 13 (June 1935): 194.

backgrounds, these women performed various forms of subject – positioning. Continuing the themes of pre-1919 writings about women, topics such as *tadbir al-manzil* (home management), *bab al-tarbiat al-atfal* (the education of children), *al-zina' wa al-jamal al-mar'a* (ornament and beauty of women), *al-sihha'* (hygiene), and *adab al-akhlaqia'* (moral etiquette) still occupied the pages of the day. Departing from the turn of the century's construction of women as wives and mothers, the 1920s and 30s discourse highlighted the importance of the woman as an individual in her public and private wholeness. The significance of facing present *hiya* (life) as *bahth al-asriyya* (a discourse of modernity) emerged within and without the women's circle. "Al-hiya is divided into two spheres," as a writer of *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* reminds us, "the bodily life and the spiritual life. The bodily life is connected to the survival of *al-jism* (the body), which moves as long as there is blood in it and will be destroyed when the blood stops circulating. The spiritual life, which is the life of *al-nafs* (the self), immortalizes the outcome of the individual's conduct. There is no end to this life because individuals are commemorated by the works their *nafs* do in this world and if they do good works, we should thank them in this world and also remember them after their death."¹⁶³

Construction of personal identity through the body and the self was also the subject of many debates and discussions of the time. *Al-sikulujiyya* (psychology) is a term which found its way into many of the writings of the time on *al-nafs* and *al-jism*. The prolific Coptic socialist writer, journalist, and literary critic Salama Musa stands out. In *al Majalat al-Jidida* (the New Journals), Musa included a number of articles on the subject of psychology in relation to *al naafs* and *al jism*. His article on the psychology of Adler rejected Freud's theory of the *zatiyya* (essential being) and replaced it with *quwat al-irada* (power of the will). He concluded the

¹⁶³ . *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* 3 (15 March 1927): 113-14.

article with a brief paragraph reminding girls and their parents about the significance of Adler's ideas in their lives.¹⁶⁴ "*Al-nafs, al-jism, wa al-moaliyya*," (the self, the body, and the cure), another article which appeared in the 1930s, attempted to combine psychology and *din* (*religion*), calling them both useful fields for influencing the formation of *al-nafs* in contrast to the ancient practice of healing, which considered medicine as the field of *al-jism* (the body), and religion as a field for both *al-jism* (the body) and *al-'aql* (the wisdom).¹⁶⁵

Psychology, not as a means of studying the Freudian essentialist nature of human beings, but as a science to analyze objective phenomena, addressed one's place in society based on self-assertion, self-thought, and self-responsibility. An article in *al Sayyidat wa al Rijal* referred to *al nafs al insane* (the individual self), in which mind and character acted as a court of justice where the development of conscience was dependent upon law, the arbitrator, and the enforcement of the law within that court. While the conscience was not supposed to be swayed by emotion, a limited contribution from emotion was acknowledged.¹⁶⁶

Al-musiqqa (music) was not praised solely for its Eastern/Egyptian innovations and "authenticity" but also elevated for its significance as promoter of *al-nafs* (the self) and *al-jism* (the body). Entitled "The effect of music and *al-qana'* (the song) on the mind and the nerve" the author of the article in *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* pointed out three areas in which the positive effects of music have been noted, *al-jihaz al-asabi* (the nervous system), *al-sha'n al-taqziya* (nutrition), and *amrad al-aqliya* (mental disorders). "The stress and tension produced in post-war European societies," the author claimed, "have made the significance of music essential for the nervous

¹⁶⁴ . *al-Majalat al-Jididah* 2 (January 1930): 303-7.

¹⁶⁵ . *Ibid.*, 2 (January 1930): 264-6.

¹⁶⁶ . *al-Sayyidat wa al-Rijal* 9 (June 1928): 434-40.

system and several glands of the body.”¹⁶⁷ The writer then tried to illustrate the implication of that theory through an imaginary story: “Once, an American suffered from a mental disorder and a depression. Upon a doctor’s advice he traveled to Europe but did not regain his health. One night, he visited *Dar al-Obara* (the Opera House) and watched a program with delightful musical sounds and touching melodies. By the end of the program he felt well. He continued to go to *Dar al-Obara* time and time again. His depression was lessened to the point where it was completely cured.”¹⁶⁸

Writing about the impact of music on the elevation of *al-nafs* was not the sole performative act of the authors. These women, with heterogeneous religious, ideological, and social backgrounds, stretched the spatiality of their own and their subjects’ performative roles beyond the period’s acceptable norms for women’s presence in public. The pages of *Ruz al-Yusuf* and *al-Fatat* (The Girls) were full of visual and literal narratives about activities and lives of women artists in the fields of music, theatre, and cinema. The so called trio – Munira al-Mahdiyya, Fathiyya Ahmad, and Umm Kulthum – were subjects and objects of constant spectatorship, at one time generating a popularity contest in one journal.¹⁶⁹ News about women artists who were finally able to open their own salons was top priority, accompanied by illustrations of the artists.¹⁷⁰ These photographs often pushed beyond the period’s standards of acceptability regarding women’s appearance in public. While dancers and other performance artists found ways to challenge the prevalent gaze of the time, both within the pages of the press

¹⁶⁷ . *al-Mar’a al-Misriyya* 6 (15 October 1925): 448.

¹⁶⁸ . Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ . *Ruz al-Yusuf* 1 (2 June 1926): 14.

¹⁷⁰ . *al-Hisan* 8 (10 May 1933): 1.

and in public – theatres, casinos, and salons – dancing, in general, as a form of aesthetic art and a profession for girls generated contradictory responses and debates in the pages of the press.

An example of such controversy was an article in *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya*, quoting *al-Ahram*'s report on a dance competition, which took place at a dance club in the Casino of San Stefano in Alexandria. The writer in *al-Nahda* expressed distress about the couples who performed what *al-Ahram* had called a “spectacular form of modern dance,” blaming the daughters of several pashas for outrageous spending on their dresses.¹⁷¹ The writer in *al-Nahda* argued that there is no such thing as an “indigenous form of modern dance” in Egypt. European influence on aristocratic families in Egypt gave rise to this dance form, passed on to the middle class through popular education. The author in *al-Nahda* called dance a temptation with a strong negative impact on one's moral self. The writer pointed out the conflict and ultimately divorce between the Napoleon of the East (Mustafa Kemal Pasha or Attaturk) and his wife Latifa Hanim as evidence. “Despite his love for his wife,” the author continued, “Mustafa Kamal Pasha divorced her because she refused to support his decision for the sake of justice. He had punished her brother, who had created a scene after an ambassador's wife refused to dance with him at a high official club party.” The *al-Nahda* writer claimed that in 1894, an imprisonment and a fine were decreed against a dancer in Egypt, laying the ground for the 1927 law for any public act disturbing public morals. The article addressed the importance of avoiding such disgrace, which has contaminated the land of Egypt, and hoped for the implementation of the act by the government.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ . *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* 5 (June 1927): 203.

¹⁷² . *Ibid.*, 204-5.

Before women appeared for the first time in the cinema in 1927, they had performed in theatres, salons, and casinos as dancers and singers. Even after 1927, many women performed in musical presentations, theatre and cinema. Women's contribution to the emergence of the field of aesthetics as well as their inspiration from this field were part of the process of women's identity formation, in which visual and public presence played a key role. *Al-Fatat*, *Ruz al-Yusuf*, and *al-Mihrajan* all reported news about theatres, playhouses, salons, and representational performances. Pictorial news about Fathiyya Ahmed, Fatima Rushdi, 'Aziza Amir, Badiyya Masa'bni, Mari Mansur, and Ruz al-Yusuf appeared in the pages of these journals. Life stories were included about their marriages, pregnancies, travels, and professional rivalries and accomplishments, such as joining a new company or opening their own salons or performance groups. However, these journals also reflected complexities involved in the acceptance of these art forms as appropriate professions for women by society and its people. While *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* published news about a few women singers and performers,¹⁷³ its editor Labiba Ahmad criticized women's work in the field of theater in its September, 1934. Ahmed indicated that this profession tries to appeal to girls who belong to upper class strata. While she rejected acting and considered it an immoral profession for women, she showed some tolerance toward playwriting as a quasi-decent profession. However, she believed that as the result of a monopoly by males in this profession, women would not be able to produce remarkable plays since they were held to writing stories only about love and deceit. At the end, she emphasized women's responsibility to uplift the nation's morals.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ . *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* 5 (June 1927): 225-6; Ibid., 5 (July 1927): 255; Ibid., 5 (December 1927): 435-7; Ibid., 8 (January 1930): 28-9.

¹⁷⁴ . *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* 12 (September 1934): 289-91.

The rise of ‘Aziza Amir as the producer of the first native Egyptian film, *Layla*, in 1927, was a turning point in transforming the definition of the emergence of women in the field of aesthetics from that of *al-fann* (art) into that of *al sana’* (profession). Women performers like Fatima Rushdi, Assia Daghir, and Bahija Hafiz also worked as producers, scriptwriters, and directors in the 1920s and 30s.¹⁷⁵ While articles appeared in *al-Mar’a al-Misriyya* and *al-Nahda al-Nisa’iyya* on the usefulness of documentary cinema as a means to education, and on the question of whether cinema would take the place of the book in Egyptian culture,¹⁷⁶ the journal *al-Mihrajan* published a critical article about the lack of women in national cinema. The author argued that, “many clubs have emerged as the result of the people’s awareness of the cinema. However, these clubs will have no positive impact on young Egyptian females who are discouraged from entering the world of cinema and participating in this art as a profession, contrary to the way they had participated earlier in other arts such as music and theatre.”¹⁷⁷

Writing about body and the emergence of a culture of body performance in women’s journals, could obviously not ignore themes such as the nature of and means to beauty, fashion, and health.¹⁷⁸ A debate about the traditional preference for long hair for women and the present trend towards short cuts took place between a reader and the author of *al-Mar’a al-Misriyya*. The reader claimed that she did not like the new short-hair-style, but in order to follow the trend she had cut her hair short. In response, the author of *al-Mar’a* suggested that if Egyptian women

¹⁷⁵ . Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998), 13.

¹⁷⁶ . *al-Mar’a al-Misriyya* 6 (15 February 1925): 108; *al-Nahda al-Nisa’iyya* 16 (March 1938): 87.

¹⁷⁷ . *al-Mihrajan* 2 (15 March 1939): 65-6.

¹⁷⁸ . *al-Nahda al-Nisa’iyya* 8 (July 1930): 231-3.

stop following the present fashion of hairstyles, the trend would soon disappear.¹⁷⁹ Illustrations of physical exercises for women, sketches or photographs of fashions of the day, articles on healthy foods accompanied by recipes for natural cosmetics, and the impact of water and air on women's health were all included.¹⁸⁰

The discourse of *al-hijab* (veiling) and *al-sufur* (unveiling) was a popular one of the period, both in the women's press and in the general press,¹⁸¹ but *fi majalis al-sayyidat* (at the women's gathering) page in *al-Sayyidat wa al-Rijal*, also published a dialogue among women regarding the subject of *al-tarbush* and *al-birnita* – head coverings for men. In it women addressed not only men who had replaced the *tarbush* with the *birnita* but also Egyptian women who have chosen to wear *al-birnita*. Referring to *al birnita* as an element of economic dependence and cultural slavery to European countries, these women proposed organizing an international conference on fashion in the Middle East, in which both men and women would participate. They praised Iraqis for being able to create a form of *al-birnita* in a different style from that of the Europeans. They raised the question of how one could claim to oppose European colonialism but follow European fashion and customs.¹⁸² The emergence of *al-Zi al-*

¹⁷⁹ . *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* 6 (15 April 1925): 220.

¹⁸⁰ . On physical exercise see *al-Sayyidat wa al-Rijal* 9 (August 1928): 601-5; Ibid. 9 (March 1928): 287-90; on fashion see *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* 6 (15 October 1925): 436-8; *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* 5 (November 1927): 379; Ibid., 12 (April 1934): 109-10; *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* 6 (15 December 1925): 549; on food and health see *al-Sayyidat wa al-Rijal* 9 (January 1928): 181-5; *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* 8 (15 March 1927): 158-9; on the impact of air and water and recipes for cosmetics see *al-Sayyidat wa al-Rijal* 8 (30 January 1927): 190-2; Ibid., 9 (March 1928): 287-90; Ibid., 9 (August 1928): 601-5.

¹⁸¹ . *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* 6 (15 October 1925): 408-9; Ibid., 6 (15 December 1925): 517-8; Ibid., 8 (15 April 1927): 276-8; *al-Sayyidat wa al-Rijal* 9 (May 1928): 424-5; Ibid. 9 (September 1928): 748-51; on men's journals see *al-Sufur* 8 (2 April 1925): 1-8; *al-Mar'a al-Jidida* 1 (16 October 1924): 42; *al-Balagh al-Ushbu'iyya* 9 (December 1927): 22-30.

¹⁸² . *al-Sayyidat wa al-Rijal* 7 (March 1926): 246-52; The term *al-tarbush* was used for so called "traditional" men's head cover worn in Egypt and some other Arab countries, while *al-birnita* referred to European style head wear. For additional textual and visual debates on the question of *al-tarbush* and *al-birnita* and a brief history of the definition of *al tarbush* see *Ruz al-Yusuf* 1 (16 June 1926): 7; *al-Sayyidat wa al-Rijal* 7 (August 1926): 502-8.

Misri (Egyptian fashion) to end the dilemma created by European influences was an alternative proposed by Labiba Ahmed in *al Nahda al Nisa'iyya*.¹⁸³

Labiba Ahmed's position on Egyptian fashion and her pro Islamic nationalist ideologies definitely distinguished her from the secular nationalist views of Ruz al-Yusuf. Labiba Ahmed (1870s-1951) was a supporter of Mustafa Kamel's *Watani* party and founder of the Society of Egyptian Ladies' Awakening. A political activist with traditional belief in Islamic law, Labiba, notwithstanding, supported *Wafd* and Sa'd Zaghlul's efforts to gain independence for Egypt. Although she included many articles about and photographs of Egyptian performing artists Labiba promoted the idea of avoiding theatre and entertainment venues and placing a ban on dancing and drinking. She promoted the idea of studying the Quran, boycotting foreign schools, and supporting native products. Her Islamic allegiance was also reflected in her call to distinguish between girls and boys curricula, promote women's veiling, and provide financial aid to Palestinians during the 1936 Arab upheaval. She went on pilgrimage to Mecca several times and expanded her Islamic networks to Saudi Arabia, India, and Jerusalem. She also connected herself with the Muslim Brotherhood and founded *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* (the Muslim Sisters). Labiba Ahmed also went on the air and delivered a weekly talk on Egyptian National Radio.¹⁸⁴ In presenting an image of a modern Islamist woman *al-Nahda al-Nissa'iyya* stood in opposition to the image of secular "New Woman" portrayed by Ruz al-Yusuf. However, both Labiba Ahmed and Ruz al-Yusuf were aware of the meaning and effectiveness of the visibility of one's own image, through displaying visual images of other women's identities. The press suggested that in the process of "seeing themselves" as whole individuals and in being

¹⁸³ . *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* 5 (April 1927): 121-2.

¹⁸⁴ . Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*.

able to see their societies and to interact with them, women writers and artists of the 1920s and 30s needed to see others and be seen by others.



Figure 4: Rooznameh Ayandeh Iran (The Newspaper of the Future of Iran), February 1938 (Majallat (The Periodicals) Section of the Central Library of the University of Tehran).



Figure 5: *Majalle Payk-e Sa'adat-e Iran* (*The Journal of the Messenger of Women's Happiness*), April 1930 (*Majallat* (The Periodicals) Section of the Central Library of the University of Tehran).



Figure 6: Labiba Ahmed, the Editor of the Journal *al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* (The Women's Awakening) (*Ruz al-Yusuf*, 35 (June 30, 1926): Cover Page).

السيدة منيرة المهدي



فالأولى هي «السيدة فتحية احمد»
والثانية هي «السيدة منيرة المهدي»
السؤال الثاني :
من هي التي يؤتمر فيك صوتها أكثر
من سواها ؟
عدد الاصوات — ١٣٢
نالت السيدة فتحية احمد ٩٠ صوتا
نالت الانسة ام كلثوم ٢٣ صوتا
نالت السيدة منيرة المهدي ١٩ صوتا
فالأولى هي «السيدة فتحية احمد»
والثانية هي «الآنسة ام كلثوم»
السؤال الثالث :
من هي الاكثر إلماماً بفن الغناء ؟
عدد الاصوات — ١٢٩
نالت السيدة فتحية احمد ٩٦ صوتا
نالت السيدة منيرة المهدي ٢٧ صوتا
نالت الانسة ام كلثوم ٦ اصوات

السيدة فتحية احمد



فتائج مدهشة !

في يوم الخميس ٢٧ مايو سنة ١٩٢٦ الساعة
الخامسة مساء اجتماعنا نحن الموقعين أدناه لفرز الاجوبة
التي وردت الى ادارة مجلة روز اليوسف رداً على
الاستفتاء المنشور في العدد ٢٩ حول السيدات منيرة
المهدي وام كلثوم وفتحية احمد . وبعد الانتهاء من
فرز الاوراق وحصر الاصوات كانت النتيجة كما يلي :

السؤال الاول :
من هي الاجل صوتاً من هؤلاء المطربات الثلاث ؟
عدد الاصوات — ١٤٣
نالت السيدة فتحية احمد ٩٤ صوتا
نالت السيدة منيرة المهدي ٣٠ صوتا
نالت الانسة ام كلثوم ١٩ صوتا

الآنسة ام كلثوم



فالأولى هي السيدة « فتحية احمد »
والثانية هي « السيدة منيرة المهدي »
السؤال الرابع :
إذا فرضنا أن هؤلاء المطربات الثلاث كن
يغنين في ليلة واحدة في أما كن مختلفتين فأيهن تفضل
أن تذهب لسماعها ؟
عدد الاصوات ١٢٤
نالت السيدة فتحية احمد ٦٣ صوتا
نالت السيدة منيرة المهدي ٤٧ صوتا
نالت الانسة ام كلثوم ١٤ صوتا
فالأولى هي « السيدة فتحية احمد »
والثانية هي « السيدة منيرة المهدي »
وفيما عدا هذا فقد احتسبنا ٤٧ صوتا لاغيا

Figure 7: Public Announcement of the Popular Contest Held between *al-Mutarabat al-Salasa* (the Three Artists) *Ruz al-Yusuf* 31 (June 2, 1926): 14).



Figure 8: *Zakariyyat* (The Memoirs) by Fatima al-Yusuf, the Editor of the Art Journal *Ruz al-Yusuf*.

Chapter Three

*Asl/al-Asala (Authentic Culture), Sonnat/al-Sunna (Tradition),
Tajaddod/al-Jidida (Modernity), and Zan-e Emrouzi/al-Mar'a al-Jidida
(The “New Woman”)*

Introductory Piece

In this chapter, I will explore the aesthetics as well as the socio-political “tradition” of the history of performance, from which emerged two distinguished female performers of the interwar period in Egypt and Iran who played important pioneering roles as women performers in the twentieth century Middle East. The creative performative practices of Iranian stage singer, Qamar al-Molouk Vaziri, and of the Egyptian musical theatre performer, Munira al-Mahdiyya, embodied distinctive features of artistic transformations of the interwar period, including the public emergence of women in performing arts, the impact of the commercial culture of recording companies, radio, and film on art, and the appearance of an artistic life formed by the newly growing urban public middle class.¹⁸⁵

However, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, cultural life, both in Iran and Egypt, was highly influenced by intellectual and political ideologies, movements, and sentiments tied to ideas of nationalism and national identity through debates concerning arts, regional history, modernity, and gender. Entertainment venues such as theatrical performances, music, and film were both influenced by and reflected the dynamics of these ideologies. Questions of cultural continuity, conflicts between authenticity and contemporaneity, tradition and modernity, and ideologies of resistance to/adaptation of Western aesthetics, culture, and

¹⁸⁵ . Salwa el-Shawan Castelo-Branco, “Performance of Arab Music in Twentieth-Century Egypt: Reconciling Authenticity and Contemporaneity,” *Asian Music* 12, no. 1: 557-61.

technologies were all involved.¹⁸⁶ The impact of such intellectual and cultural ideologies and movements on the performing arts, as well as the interaction between the two, raised the question of how “tradition” (*sonnat* in Persian and *al-sunna* in Arabic) and continuity related to the cultural practices of the performing arts of a society at such a critical period of emerging nationalist ideals. As significant contributors to creating personal, public, and national identity, performing arts addressed the question of a search for cultural “roots” (*asl* in Persian and *al-asala* in Arabic) and the meaning of “tradition.” Placed in a dualistic position against “modernity,” as Jean During recalls, “the term *sonnati* may have had an established meaning at the beginning of the twentieth century.”¹⁸⁷ However, a closer examination of the history of performance in Egypt and Iran calls into question the consistency of such a dualistic positioning.

Although the term *sonnat* or *al-sunna* is defined as static, “many breaks in the continuing and sharper renewal of the performance in the Middle East” throughout its historical development address substantial dynamic variables, and continuous deconstruction and reconstruction. As During has demonstrated in the case of Iranian music, the concept of authenticity (*asl*) defines *sonnat* not in terms of appropriate nationalist norms of geography, language, and culture, although it embodies all those elements at once, but as the mysticism of the whole, nature and culture, individual’s *hal o hava* (ethos and atmosphere) as a form of aesthetic and emotional experiences of the artist who internalized the purity of the form’s ethnic origins and geographic boundaries. Transformations in political and cultural life and thought of Iran, and certainly of Egypt, during the second half of the nineteenth century, and in the status of the artist, had an inevitable impact on the content and form of artistic productions. While

¹⁸⁶ . Ibid., 561.

¹⁸⁷ . Jean During, “Tradition and History: The Case of Iran,” *Asian Music* 12, no. 1: 853.

“reinvention” in artistic productions may refer to change, it is important to consider this change through a continuous line and within the confines of traditional superstructures. Iranian traditional (*sonnati*) music, *radif*, for example became lighter and transmitted sweeter versions during the second half of the nineteenth century, but it was still rooted in an ancient pre-Islamic past, Barbad, the first Iranian name in music who lived in the sixth century.¹⁸⁸ In Egypt, following the 1932 Arab Music Conference in Cairo, the term *al-musiqā al-arabiyya* (Arab music) was used to replace the previously widespread term *al-musiqā al-sharqiyya* (oriental music) in order to identify not only music but also a culture which is “at one *asil* ‘authentic’ and *mua’sir* ‘contemporary,’ reconciling *al-turath wa al-hadatha* ‘tradition and modernity’.”¹⁸⁹ As During has pointed out, “If there was reinvention, we must ask ourselves what the word ‘tradition’ means and in what way the new tradition is a continuation of the old.”¹⁹⁰

In order to understand the pioneering position of Qamar and Munira in relation to “the advent of a certain form of modernity (*asil-e novin* in Persian) which contains the development of a new form of ‘tradition’ as its major or vital contributing element,”¹⁹¹ I will begin this section with an examination of the “tradition” of performance through the lens of an historical articulation of the term “cultural roots” (*asl* in Persian and *al-asala* in Arabic) in Iran and Egypt. By cultural roots I mean both stylistic and social elements (characteristics), which contributed to the formation and development of the tradition of performance in Iran and Egypt, while they continued to live as elements of remembering within the artistic works and lives of a number of

¹⁸⁸ . Ibid., 853-64.

¹⁸⁹ . Castelo-Branco, “Performance of Arab Music in Twentieth-Century Egypt,” 557; *Musique Arabe: Le Congrès du Caire de 1932* (Cairo: CEDEJ, 1992).

¹⁹⁰ . During, “Tradition and History,” 859.

¹⁹¹ . Ibid., 854.

performers of the interwar period including Qamar and Munira, notwithstanding the interruptive impact of socio-political transformations of the time on the art of performance. These elements assumed major significance at critical moment in the history of both countries, because of their mirroring the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' socio-political debates. Both Qamar and Munira were conscious of these particular attributes and they viewed themselves not only as the products of their times but also both as women and as artists seeking to move past the limitations of artistic and social traditions, and enlarge the scope of possibilities in their professional works as well as personal lives. Like the late Iranian filmmaker, Ali Hatami, I intend to explore the artistic works and lives of Qamar and Munira, first by locating them as emerging individual artists out and "in front of the memories of the past civilization, inside decorations, engaged with old objects and transformation of architecture and the atmosphere."¹⁹²

During the interwar period, there was a trajectory between the binary discourse of authenticity and contemporaneity, tradition and modernity, and ideologies of resistance to/adaptation of Western aesthetics articulated in art and the ideological debates concerning modernity, gender, national identity and regional history addressed within the society. This trajectory was reflected in and was a reflection of the questions of the public emergence of women in performing arts, the impact of the commercial culture of recording companies, radio, and film on art, and the appearance of an artistic life formed by the newly growing urban public middle class. Performing arts of the interwar period embodied the emerging concept of the "New Woman," both debated within the society and staged inside the theatre and concert halls. On the discursive level, the "New Woman" in performing arts engaged the question of cultural

¹⁹² . *Zanan (The Women)* 16 (April 2007): 48.

identity as a fluid form of *tajaddod* or *al-jidida* (modernity) “containing development of ‘tradition’ as its major contributing element.”¹⁹³

On the practical level, the “New Woman” in performing arts placed female artists in a visible artistic and professional path different from their behind-the-scene work in the nineteenth century. As public figures they responded to the shifts, kept “traditions,” and negotiated resistance to and adaptation of foreign aesthetics in their artistic representations. In the process, they challenged dominant norms of idealized sexual division in art, as well as in society, created a new set of relationships, and negotiated, made alliances and asserted their struggle to survive, even temporarily, within this newly emerged visual public sphere of performing arts. In this chapter I address the following questions: What role did the concept of tradition in performing arts play in creating/advancing innovations for Qamar and Munira, both in terms of artistic and socio-political transformations, from which the ideology and debates about the concept of the “New Woman” emerged? In what ways was the process of the emergence of the figure of the “New Woman” in performing arts a product as well as the producer of the society’s debates about modernity, gender, resistance, and national identity?

Performance Art in Pre-Nineteenth Century Iran

Before the nineteenth century, performance in Egypt and Iran encompassed many forms of artistic expressions in public, including acting, reciting, signing, and dancing. The unity of what is considered today as the aesthetic and practice of the “performing arts” of the time disintegrated with the establishment in the early twentieth century of separate training institutions, although many artists during the interwar period were still integrating those artistic forms in their performances in public. “The status of entertainers became increasingly

¹⁹³ . During, “Tradition and History,” 854.

determined by the form and context of their performance” only when in the 1930s different professional arts schools began to flourish.¹⁹⁴ Performance (*namayesh* in Persian) originally emerged from the development of religious ceremonies and rituals. According to Bahram Beyzai’, the relatively earth-tied human life and the divinely connected stories of the gods and goddesses of polytheistic societies made it possible for the imagination to grow and express itself openly, whereas forbidding the depiction of gods in monotheistic cultures either killed or delayed the process of the emergence of such imagination. Throughout time, the desire for entertainment expressed by the artist as well as the audience created new characteristics for *namayesh*, which resulted in slowly replacing religious aspects with entertaining entities in the interest of mass population. In this process, while on the one hand, the ruling class played an important role in the survival of *namayesh* for the sake of establishing a link between politics and religion, the aristocracy, on the other hand, intervened to elevate its social validity by tying its own class with major artists. The third way of survival of *namayesh* came through support from the masses.¹⁹⁵

Major historical and cultural lines of the land of Iran, from the rise of the first royal settlements near the civilization of Mesopotamia to the arrival of Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Turks, and Mongols, to the wars with Afghans, Ottomans, and Indians, and to the intervention by Russians, French, and British are marked by political chaos and crisis, which created contradictions between religions, languages and dialects, ethnic groups, and native and foreign cultures. In pre-Islamic Iran, calligraphy and plastic arts were used to decorate the walls of royal

¹⁹⁴ . van Nieuwkerk, “A Trade Like Any Other”; Racy, “Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932.”

¹⁹⁵ . Bahram Beyzai’, *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Roshangaran wa Motale’at-e Zanan, 2004).

palaces, and dancers, musicians, and performers were brought from India for royal courts, distancing the flourishing of imaginative spirits from the masses.¹⁹⁶ However, sculpted images of individuals in a conversation mode during the Sasanid period document the art of *namayesh* in religious form.¹⁹⁷ Post-Islamic aristocracy promoted the Quranic recitations. In societies like Iran where religion has played a stronger role than politics, religious *namayesh* gained more popular support. Non-religious *namayesh* did not present the mundane lives of the masses, because the ruling system did not allow the reflection of hopes and expression of losses and could not accept social criticism. Non-religious performers then sought comical venues as means of expression, which in turn were rejected by religious authorities, turning the performers into *motreb mardomi* (popular entertainer), falling person, and clown.¹⁹⁸

Within pre-historic Iranian tribes and communities, *naqqali* (narration) emerged as the first genre of storytelling accompanied with movements in front of an audience. Heroic and mythical stories were narrated in these gatherings, which aimed at elevating emotional feelings instead of stimulating the intellect of the audience. It is believed that pre-Islamic *naqqali* was accompanied by a musical instrument, possibly a *chang* (harp) through which *naqqal* was able to establish a harmonious relationship between the narration and the music. This type of *naqqali* was called *qawwali* (dialogue), which in the Islamic period lost its musical component. Prior to the popular recitation of Ferdowsi's *Shah-nameh*, the Persian subject of *naqqali*, *nowheh* (lamentation) of people of Bukhara for the death of Siyavash was considered the earliest

¹⁹⁶ . Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ . Atousa Sami', "Az Zanpush ta Zan, Honar-e Namayesh-e Zanan: Gozar as Sonnat be Modernism (From Female Mimicry to Woman, the Art of Women's Theatre: Passage from Tradition to Modernism)," *Jens-e Dowwom (The Second Sex)* 2, no. 6 (1999): 4-14.

¹⁹⁸ . Beyzai', *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*.

example of the pre-Islamic *naqqali*. *Naqqali* had its roots in the culture of the illiterate masses, based on the art of improvisation, performed in streets and neighborhood corners far away from the documented ancient mythical musical stories presented in royal palaces. Stories told through *naqqali* were passed on to the next generation, and times and spaces had major impacts on its forms and contents. *Naqqal* has been considered one of the most traditional and important faces of the Iranian *namayesh*. *Naqqali* was a very difficult profession, requiring skill, maturity, and knowledge of technique. The *naqqal*'s skill rested in his ability to know the psychology of his audience. He knew which part of the story interested the audience and how he should narrate that part to excite them. He knew how to excite the audience pleasantly through activities such as making breaks in speeches, creating a dialogue with music, right movement of hand and head, elongating the narrative, occasional murmuring and change in tone of voice, and keeping the audience in a state of limbo through numerous pauses at the most dramatic moments of the story. Features such as stage decoration or music could not have been much of assistance, because the performance took place in a teahouse with a very few images on the wall, and no musical group in attendance. Although only men performed *naqqali* in public, women also contributed to this art in different ways. Fakhroldoleh, Nasir al-Din Shah's (1848-1896) sister, recorded and documented the stories of *Amir al-Salan* and *Zarrin Molk* from *naqqali* of Naqib al-Mamalek, who was at the service of the royal court.¹⁹⁹

“The religion which took over Iran under Arab attacks did not know *namayesh* to offer it or prohibit it. What forbade *namayesh* were religion mediators, meaning ‘*ulema*, who rejected *shabih sazi* (likeness making).”²⁰⁰ The first Islamic *naqqali* dates from the third century of Islam, and is considered the beginning of the spread of sentiments opposing Arab rule among

¹⁹⁹ . Beyzai', *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*.

²⁰⁰ . Ibid., 52.

Iranians. From the fifth century C.E. on, a kind of spiritual *naqqali* developed in Iran, against those who had lost their power and wealth under Islamic rulers and were engaged in promoting anti-Arab sentiments. In the sixth century C.E. it became a branch of *naqqali* with Islamic propagandist intention and known as *monaqib khaman* (*Shi'a* narrators), using the stories about Ali and his bravery against *fazel khaman* (*Sunni* narrators) with stories about Omar and Abubakr as well as the ancient mythical narrations about *Rostam and Esfandiyar*.²⁰¹ By the ninth century, these forms of *nawheh khani* gained special fame and credibility as the first form of drama in Iranian *namayesh*.²⁰²

Naqqali advanced during the Safavids (1501-1736), a time for the reestablishment of peace and cultural innovations. Besides storytelling, songs, and poetry readings, acrobatic and comical activities were added to *naqqali*. *Shah-nameh khani* (narration of the Book of the King by Ferdowsi) were presented in many teahouses in big cities under Shah Abbas the Great (1587-1629). *Shah-nameh khani* (reciting the Shah-nameh) was not an easy task and *shah-nameh khaman* were often poets or literate individuals. Shah Abbas himself had enormous interest in the *Shah-nameh* and many *shah-nameh khaman* performed in his court. Religious *naqqali* and *madh* (admiration) for 'Ali were also performed in teahouses. *Hamleh khani*, *pardeh dari*, *surat khani*, *sokhanvari* and *rozeh khani* were other forms of religious *naqqali* which emerged during the Safavids. *Pardeh dari*, from the point of view of the storytelling, was more entertaining and

²⁰¹ . *Shi'a* and *Sunni* are two branches of Islam. Followers of *Shi'a* sect believe in Prophet's family hereditary of Imam (religious leaders) whereas the *Sunni* chose *khaliphate* (an outside leader) to follow footsteps of the Prophet. 'Ali, who married Prophet's daughter, was the first Imam in *Shi'a* sect. Omar was the first *Khalipha* chosen by people after the death of the Prophet. Rostam and Afrasiyab are two characters from the epic story of *Shahnameh* (Book of the King), Rostam symbol of goodness and Esfandiyar associated with bad spirit, because of the innocent assassination of Siyawash, Rostam's son, by the hands of Esfandiyar. Beyzai'.

²⁰² . Sami'i, "Az Zanpush ta Zan, Honar-e Namayesh-e Zanan ((From Female Mimicry to Woman.), 6.

popular than *rozeh khani*. *Sokhanvari* was another form of the competition between *monaqib khanan* (*Shi'a* narrators) and *fazael khanan* (*Sunni* narrators).²⁰³

Rozeh khani included stories and events related to the incident of Karbala. *Rozeh khan* (the chanter) performed on top of the *menbar* (podium) and in front of the crowd. *Rozeh khani* seems to have been derived from *monaqib khani* and took a new form from the time of the Safavids or even earlier. Public events like *rozeh khani* normally were organized by wealthy individuals, puritans, politicians, and tradesmen during the first ten days of the month of *Moharram*.²⁰⁴ Usually, *rozeh khanan* were divided into *vae'zin* and *zakerin*. The main work of *vae'zin* would be people's guidance whereas *zakerin* told religious events and stories of the sufferings. *Zakerin* had good voices and a command of music. Their knowledge of the subject of their stories, psychological knowledge of the audience, and expertise in combining words for their narration would attract more viewers and listeners. They also enjoyed having the power of a good imagination. Because of its religious nature, this form of *naqqali* mainly focused on expression and words instead of play and movements. Female *rozeh khan* also existed in different regions of Iran but the date of their first appearance is not known. They carried the title of *mulla*. Official references to female *rozeh khanan* are registered during mid Qajar dynasty (mid nineteenth century) and names of a few *rozeh khanan* have reached us today such as Mulla Nabat, Mulla Fatima, and Mulla Maryam.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ . Beyzai', *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*; Behrouz Gharibpour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)* (Tehran: Daftar-e Pajouheshhay-e Farhangi, 2005).

²⁰⁴ . *Moharram* is the first month of the Islamic year al-Hijriyya, which began in 622 CE when the Prophet migrated from the city of Makka to Madina. It is also the month in which Imam Hussein was assassinated.

²⁰⁵ . Beyzai', *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*; Sami', "Az Zanpush ta Zan, Honar-e Namayeshe- Zanan (From Female Mimicry to Woman)"; Gharibpour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)*.

Under the Safavids, various small entertaining types of performances (*namayeshhaye shadi awar*) called *tamasha* (the act of looking) also took place in the neighborhood corners and squares. *Mutreb dawrehgard* (gypsy entertainers) played an important role in the development of these forms of *namayesh*. The success of these performances was related to the fact that the majority of the population lived a nomadic life. The Jewish minorities were among the pioneers in *tamasha*, since they had the permission to perform non-religious *namayesh*. They mostly came from the villages, and at the end of the Safavid period they settled in cities and performed in teahouses and were invited to lower middle class houses for such festivities as weddings, baby naming, or circumcisions. Royal courts and their families invited *mutreb majlesi* (courtly entertainers) to their parties, and paid them well. A number of these *mutreban* included elements of storytelling in their music and initiated satirical *taqlid* (mimics), which incorporated shocking social critiques of the aristocracy. Stories told in these performances were contemporary tales instead of historical epics. They included critiques of family, traditions, and dishonest loves and feelings. One of the important characteristics of *taqlid* was the lack of specific time and space. They gained popularity among masses as well as the royal courts. Many of these critiques may have been made through the indirect encouragement of the kings who were unable to criticize their relatives directly themselves. Their popularity among the masses, though, created problems for the governmental authorities, who banned them from acting out of fears of social unrest. Most significantly, they were not written down. *Namayesh filbedaheh* (improvisation performance) was based on stage innovation and so could not be written out in advance. The improvisational nature of *namayesh filbedaheh*, strangely, worked towards its development and expansion and made it hard for the authorities to control.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ . Beyzai', *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*; Gharibpour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)*..

Actors changed their styles according to their audience. Initially, the story of *namayesh* could be enlarged or cut down depending on the audience; no *namayesh* was performed the same way twice. The art of *taqlid* was in acting and performing not in the content and the story. In *taqlid*, sometimes criticism could be covered by humor. *Namayesh* did not analyze problems; they merely scratched the surface of the artificial social contracts. Actors did not intend to give life to real events but solely to resemble life. The music of *taqlid* was made of measures, *rengha* (melodies). Songs were sometimes made up for *namayesh*, and sometimes copied from popular mass culture. The original musical instruments were *tar*, *kamancheh*, and *zarb*. The music was an ornamental and rich element and creator of a happy environment. During *namayesh* it filled the possible gaps in composition with the movements on the stage, sometimes following the movements and sometimes having movement following the music. All the expressions were transmitted to the audience through music. The satirical music of jokers and *motreban* (entertainers), which had been successful for years, finally reached its high point in *taqlid*. The dress used in *taqlid* was inspired by the dancing outfits, decorative, and rich. To identify people from different regions they used specific elements, for example using a *finah* hat for referring to Egyptians. There was also makeup. By the end of the Safavid dynasty, *taqlid* had weakened because of the rise of the sectarian '*ulema*. Once again these *motreban* (entertainers) became *dawrehgard* (nomads). During Aqa Mohammad Khan Qajar's reign (1794-97), Tehran became the capital, and *motreban dawrehgard* were allowed to settle there. *Dasteh Mua'yyid* (Muayyid Troup) was the most famous *dasteh* from the time of Ahmad Shah Qajar (1909-1925) and in the early Pahlavi period (1925-40). Muayyid strengthened the structure of *namayesh* by training

those who had talents. His character and way of encouraging actors turned the competition between *dastehha* into cooperation.²⁰⁷

Women were not allowed to perform in *namayesh*, and young boys played their roles instead. By the middle of the Safavids period, first class *dastehaye Motreb* (entertaining troupes) in the city who performed for the upper class and aristocrats often had non-Muslim female dancers in their groups. For the sake of the aristocrats, religious authorities overlooked this issue. However, the second-class *dasteha* (troups) – meaning the popular *motrebs* – were faced with difficulties, depending on the power or weaknesses of religious authorities in different situations. Overall, religious authorities rejected *motreban*, both women and men. By the end of the Safavids, having women dancers or actresses was prohibited, as the government weakened and the sectarian ‘ulema grew stronger. During the Qajar period, there were a few female *dastehaye motreb* who performed in both women’s and men’s gatherings. Female performers, whose performances in women’s gatherings still did not alleviate their bad reputations, performed men’s dances while wearing male outfits and had all sorts of makeup and the skills of male actors. They danced and sang in men’s gatherings but their dances and singings became provocative and shocking only in women’s gatherings. It was in these women’s gatherings that slowly they gave a storytelling character to the dances and used dialogues in the form of song and designed the first form of female *taqlid*.²⁰⁸

Women’s *ta’zieh* (religious mourning) also grew out of *taqlid*, which in turn caused the appearances of women’s *namayesh tarab*. When women gathered in a place on the occasion of festivities, a few skilled in *taqlid*, satire, and speech would perform popular stories, some invented by them, others imitated from *motreban*’s stories. The entire crew of the performers of

²⁰⁷ . Ibid.

²⁰⁸ . Ibid.; Shay, “Bazi-ha-ye Namaheshi (Iranian Women’s Theatrical Plays),” 16-24.

these *namayeshha* were women and children, which justified having woman as the subject of the *namayesh*. If, by accident, there were male characters in the play, women would perform the roles. Makeup and clothes were important. A woman would wear a real male dress including an ‘*aba* (a religious/traditional male outfit), draw a mustache on her upper lip, and collect and hide her hair under a hat. Women would use extensive makeup in addition to jewelry or colored fabrics or various kinds of old clothes worn in layers. They hung on themselves such household utensils as sticks, stools, and brooms when using satire to show comic characters, especially men. In addition, a few women singers and musicians with their musical instruments sat on one side of the hall and accompanied the play. Besides having extensive freedom in projecting the *namayesh*, what attracted the viewers to these performances were their exaggerated provocations. The source of such provocation may have rested in the concept of veiling, which was assumed to cover women’s behavior in public and as a result men were always targets of teasing and critiques in such *namayesh* because of their contributions to those regulations. *Taqlid* did not have written texts and were performed according to the agreements the actors made among themselves prior to the play. Women’s *namayeshha* rapidly disappeared when women were able to enter the stages of *tamasha khaneha* (literally house of spectacle, a common term for theatre-halls) and *namayesh takht hozi* (secular social satire) in the twentieth century. It was in 1938, around the year of *kashf hejab* (the state decree of women’s unveiling), that women first played their own roles in *taqlid* in performances conducted by men. Even then, most people viewed women performers as prostitutes and fallen women and their entrance into *dastehahye motreb* and *taqlid* gained them bad reputations to the point that now the term *motreb* or *moqqlled* resembles the meaning of fallen woman.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ . Beyzai’, *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*; Sami’, “Az Zanpush ta Zan, Honar-e Namayesh- Zanan

Ta'zieh or *shabih khani* (likeness narration) was originally a form of *namayesh* based on the life story and struggle of the family and tribe of the Prophet of Islam and in particular the suffering and killing of Imam Hussein (625-680) and his family. *Ta'zieh* later was expanded and embraced all the narrative and entertaining genres from mass culture. Since the beginning of the domination of Arabs over Iran, Iranians constantly sought opportunities to free themselves by forming resistance movements and *firqiha* (sects), against the central Arab rulers, the 'Umayyids (660-750) and later the Abbasids (750-1258). Iranians for a while supported the family of the Prophet against these *kholafa* (caliphs) by forming a sect called *Shi'a*, which justified its position against the caliphates of the time (*Sunnis*) who did not belong to the family of the Prophet. Overall, Iranian support of the family of the Prophet had always been a religious cover-up for their political opposition to Arab domination. In fact, the most clever act came from the Safavids' ruler, who, by making *Shi'a* the official religion of Iran and encouraging the religious sentiments of the people against the Ottoman's *Sunni* sect, gave unity to the land and its people and stability to their own governing system. Emergence and transformation of *ta'zieh* were one of the outcomes of this political and religious independence. Safavids who wanted to keep alive this *fann* (strategy/technique) protected and supported religious poetry and architecture, as well as religious *namayesh*. The relative stability, wealth, and peace of the period also helped in the emergence and development of a middle class as well as an upper commercial group, which for various material or spiritual reasons gave financial support to religious *namayesh*. Such support encouraged the development and expansion of *namayesh* in the capital and big cities over the centuries. Under Nader Shah Afshar (1735-47), who followed the *Sunni* sect and was interested in establishing connections between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, *ta'zieh* stopped developing.

(From Female Mimicry to Woman)"; Gharibpour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)*; Shay, "Bazi-ha-ye Namaheshi (Iranian Women's Theatrical Plays)."

In the Qajar period, especially with Nasir al-Din Shah, *ta'zieh* reached its high point of expansion and grandeur with the support of both the masses as a religious phenomenon and the upper class as a mean to entertainment, wealth, and competition. Such support was not merely for the sake of the *namayesh*, but also for gaining national credit for the shah against those 'ulema who built mosques and religious monuments as a way of opposing the performance of *ta'zieh*. Nasir al-Din Shah encouraged the transformation of *ta'zieh* from a religious *namayesh* into an entertaining medium embodying a pure sense of performance, which moved *ta'zieh* from its popular basis and brought it into an aristocratic arena.²¹⁰

Ta'zieh was transformed over the span of seven centuries, eliminating *naqqalan* and replacing them with actors in the form of characters from the story who would have dialogues with each other, telling their stories to the audience themselves. *Ta'zieh* was performed both at the city squares and cemeteries as well as temporary *tamasha khaneha*, which were called *tekieh* or *husseinieh*. *Ta'zieh nameha* (narratives) were in the form of poetry, which the actors sang with music and special expressions and sentiments. Although *ta'zieh* was in search of its own appropriate form, it was still influenced by both epic and religious *naqqali*. Many religious and non-religious *naqqalan* joined *ta'zieh* in its different phases of development. Influenced as a united group by the disaster of Karbala and sharing the same heroes, people from different classes felt a sort of solidarity during the month of *Morharram*; the poor and the rich all were there to watch, and, except for *Sunni* religious minorities, participated in the celebration of the occasion. *Ta'zieh nameha* were in the form of popular poetry, addressing the notion that poetry was the performance instead of performance being the poetry. The writers of *ta'zieh* were not artists or poets; their concerns were mostly directed towards expressing their own feelings with a

²¹⁰ . Beyzai', *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*; Garibpour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)*.

sense of honesty and faith. Literary people never approved the literature of *ta'zieh*. Although the narrative source of *ta'zieh* was derived from *naqqali* and the religious epics and mythologies of the ten days of *karbala*, *ta'azieh* did not merely tell a religious story; the focal point of these performances addressed the narrative of life, surrender, and resistance against destruction, traced back to the ancient spirit of Persians and their Zoroastrian culture and belief in duality of good and bad, nature and faith, and resistance for believing in divine justice against earthly injustice.²¹¹

The writing of *ta'zieh* became common from the mid-thirteenth century. Members of *ta'zieh* originally worked as volunteers, but later when *ta'zieh* was expanded and developed they were considered as religious professionals and were paid either by the upper class and royal court or the benefited from exemptions in their water or land taxes. Makeup, dress, and music were vital to the success of *ta'zieh* and its development, which contributed to the preservation of Iranian music as well as to the production of new traditions in music. Each character had to memorize his own song and melody while musical pieces and *maqamat* (melodies) were coordinated with the subject and the character. The music troupe consisted of seven or eight members. Its range of instruments included *nay*, *tabl*, *dohol*, *korna*, *sanj*, *sheypour*, and *qaranay*. Each instrument was assigned to a certain motif, such as the *tabl* announcing the entrance of the characters or the occurrence of an event, *sonj* the sound of the clash of arms, and *qaranay* or *sheypour* expressing the feeling of sadness. *Ta'zieh* lost its support among the upper class after the death of Nasir al-Din Shah and because of the emergence of new intellectual movements from outside Iran and the establishment of the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11. During the reign of Reza Shah, public demonstrations of religious *namayesh*, which included

²¹¹ . Ibid.

ta'zieh, were banned, since the dramatic expression of excitement attached to them could have appeared violent in the eyes of foreigners. As a result, *ta'zieh* retreated to rural areas where they could continue their performing activities away from the central government's control. This marked the beginning of a period of decline for *namayesh* in Iran, which slowly had discarded its religious skin and moved toward a more popular form of performance. After Reza Shah's fall, *ta'zieh* came back to the cities but times had changed and "people who were lost between two cultures and civilizations (East and West) were not able to welcome its return." The appearance of the new entertaining mediums of radio, television, and recording devices was an attempt to fill the major gap which had emerged between the people and *ta'zieh* by then.²¹²

Women's *ta'zieh* appeared in the house of Qamar al-Saltaneh, the daughter of Fathali Shah Qajar (1797-1834), as the continuation of women's *majalis rozeh khani* and was performed every year in the evening of the first ten days of *Moharram*. Men played the role of women in *namayesh* because of religious obstacles, and women were not allowed to attend *namayesh* at all. Women's creative intellect in the area of *namayesh*, however, did not vanish. Women's *ta'zieh*, where the actors and the audience were all women, was a form of reaction against that social morality and religious prohibition with the hope of achieving the human and civil rights denied to them. Women's *ta'azieh*, however, did not become popular because they had to be performed inside the houses of aristocrats and upper class people who had the means to provide the space and the necessary equipment. The masses did not attend these performances, which continued to merely assume entertaining functions. Actors were those who previously used to perform *ruzeh khani* in female *majalis* (sessions), or had learned the technique and tradition of acting and *naqqali* in similar sessions. Hajieh khanom, a daughter of Fathali Shah, was one of the *ta'zieh*

²¹² . Beyzai', *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*.

gardanha (coordinators). The most interesting *ta'zieh* in these sessions were those in which major heroes were women such as *ta'zieh shahrbanu*, or the wedding of the daughter of *Qureish*.²¹³ Women played in *ta'zieh* using the same ceremonies, dress, arms, and sometimes horses and other equipment they had in *ruzeh khani*. Those who played the roles of men used makeup and changed their voices. Here women in contrast to male's *ta'zieh* did not cover their faces entirely. Women's *ta'zieh* continued to appear occasionally until the mid Ahmad Shah Qajar period in the houses of aristocrats, then slowly disappeared.²¹⁴

The trajectory between stylistic genres of *namayesh* and the transformation of the social culture of Iran by the time of the collapse of the Qajar and arrival of the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11 opens a perspective to see how the society was formed politically and culturally. The narration of epic stories of Shahnameh in *naqqali* and the story of Karbala in *ta'zieh* not only reiterated the concept of collective unity against foreign encroachment (the Arabs); it also reconstructed the ancient Zoroastrian belief in justice versus exploitation. A sound voice and skill in music made the performer popular among the masses, whereas interaction between the performer and the audience brought innovations on stage in narration as well as the music. Parts of the Iranian nationalist songs were preserved by *ta'zieh* and a number of accomplished future singers and musicians were once part of *ta'zieh khani*. While *monaqib khani* versus *fazael khani* displayed the power of the court and aristocracy to promote *Shi'a* religious feelings among the masses, *ta'zieh* went through the process of changing religious performances into entertainments illustrative of the life of elites and literate individuals, which in turn created a distance between the performer and the audience. The language of criticism in

²¹³ . *Qureish* was the tribe in which the Prophet was born.

²¹⁴ . Beyzai', *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*; Sami', "Az Zanpush ta Zan, Honar-e Namayesh-e Zanan ((From Female Mimicry to Woman,); Gharibpour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)*.

taqlid pointed out the unhealthy and artificial structures of the family, in particular, and the society in general. Artists who projected these stylistic and social elements of *namayesh* through their bodies with physical gestures, magical words and sounds, and mesmerized interruptions as well as in imaginative, improvisatory, and dialogue mode were products of the trajectory between artistic traditions and society's culture.

This trajectory, however, was also produced by artists themselves, because of the importance of relationships between the artists and the masses, on the one hand, and the artists with literary groups and aristocrats, on the other. Keeping interactions with the audience was a natural and simple act because most performers went on stage from the audience. The audience also imagined itself as a part of the *namayesh*. For example in *naqqali*, the audience came and left, but they all knew the story by heart and while most cried out and a few left at the peak of the story, which was the assassination of Sohrab by Esfandiyar, some were even willing to pay *naqqal* to change the narration so Sohrab would remain alive.²¹⁵ Therefore, artists were able to mirror a sense of imagined identities not only for themselves but also among the masses, and on an extended level for aristocrats and intelligentsia. While the trajectory between artistic tradition and society's culture continued to generate ethnic, religious, and class identities through the figure of the artist up until the nineteenth century, the same trajectory shifted during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the presence of women on the stage also addressed the question of gender. As the result, the process of national and individual identity formation mirrored in performance also went through a major transformation, placing gender at the center of discourse and practice.

²¹⁵ . Beyzai', *Namayesh dar Iran (Performane in Iran)*, 82.

***Namayesh* (Performance), the Question of Woman, and the Middle Class Intelligentsia During the 1920s**

Iran became the subject of encroachment between European powers for domination much later than Egypt. However, between the end of the Safavids in 1736 and the beginning of the Qajar's reign in 1794, Iran's decentralized regions created problems for the rulers of the country who intended to establish a unified society with a central urbanized state, as happened in Egypt after 1805 under Muhammad Ali's reforms. Continuous political crises interrupted cultural continuity, opening the way for the influence of foreign cultures. During the Qajar era, interventions by the Russians and the British through imposed treaties, similar to capitulatory agreements by the French and British in Egypt, opened an indirect way to import European-style reforms and influences by the state and the elites. Towards the end of the nineteenth century a dark and bitter form of *taqlid* (social satire), requiring the audience to have a more serious approach to *namayesh* emerged. To use a specific genre of *namayesh* which could directly criticize social and political systems of the Qajar of course was difficult and quite impossible for artists.

Mirza Fathali Akhounzadeh (1812-78) has been considered the father of the European style playwright in Iran and in Asia. He wrote his plays in Tatar, Russian, and then Turkish languages, but demanded the government of the time to translate them into Persian. He wrote six comedy plays, which gained him the title of "Moliere of the East" and "Gogol of Caucasia." Akhounzadeh introduced a dark and bitter form of criticism addressing corrupt governmental authorities and social injustices, which lacked the entertaining character of *taqlid*. Although a dialogue in question and answer form was used in order to make the plays appealing to common people, these plays never found opportunities to be presented on the stage because of their harsh

critical tones and therefore gained more popularity as satirical stories to read. Akhundzadeh, a pioneer in writing and translating the first European-style melodramas, suggested that the solution lay in changing the time of the event in the story.²¹⁶ The writers, for example, should use metaphor and pretend that they are writing about chaos and disorder during Safavid instead of Qajar times, changing the names and places. This would protect them from accusations while teaching contemporary authorities to avoid exploitation and injustice. In accord with this recommendation, the French dramatist Moliere (1622-73) and his theatre of *Comedia del Arte* were considered best for adaptations and translations, both in terms of style and content. *Moqqaledan* (players of *taqlid*) were able to use the framework of the plays by Moliere and change the characters to meet their own situations. While Moliere's plays were primarily considered simple criticism of the ethics and culture of the society of their time in France, such works as *Mardom Goriz* (*Misanthrope*) took on different meanings in Iran, Egypt, Russia, and Turkey. They were mostly viewed as rebellious works, challenging the status quo. His *Misanthrope*, for example, never got permission to go on stage in Iran during the Qajar period. In Egypt, the first *tamasha khaneh* (the theatre-hall) in Cairo, which was built by the order of

²¹⁶ . In his treatise, *seh maktub* (*The Three Letters*), Akhoundzadeh criticized a Qajar prince for his capricious sexual conduct, by killing one of his ministers, in order to possess his wife. He was a harsh critic of Islam and the Prophet's behavior of marrying many young women, who contrary to their wills had to obey Islamic restrictions on them. Akhoundzadeh appraised Isma'ili *Shi'a* sect, which he believed gave more freedom to women in appearing unveiled in public. His plays also addressed question of woman. In *Vazir Khan-e Lankoran* (*The Great Minister of Lankoran*), Sho'leh convinces her husband to not marry their daughter to a wealthy old man by making arrangements for her to marry the man she loves. In *Vokala-ye Morafe'eh* (*The Quarreling Advocates*), the sister and temporary wife of a deceased man take over his estates and his daughter also claims her independence. Despite his attention to the question of woman, scholars have argued that Akhoundzadeh's reference to this issue was part of the larger context of the critique of the "despotic government" and religious backwardness which in his view were main obstacle for Iran to reach advancement and for Iranians, men and women, to be free individuals, human, and independent thinkers. See Gahribpour, *Theatr dar Iran* (*Theatre in Iran*), 61-6; Amin, C. *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman*, 26-7.

Tawfiq Pasha, was instructed to close down the same day as the result of staging Ya'qub Sannu's adaptation of *Misanthrope*.²¹⁷

The new form of *namayesh* in Iran inspired by nationalist and reformist ideas and movements, started in Tehran with staging of translations and adaptations of the works by Moliere and slowly expanded to other cities. It was viewed as the most influential venue for developing social transformations and changes in the society of the time and was welcomed by the newly emerging middle class intellectuals and nationalist leaders. It was during the reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar that the first expedition of students abroad took place. Returning to Iran, Mirza Saleh Shirazi published the first newspaper in the Persian language, and made published books accessible to people, initiating the translation movement. As a result, written sources about theatre became available to people.

However, it was during and after the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11 that reformist ideas by intellectuals who traveled abroad seeking education marked a significant moment in the life of the country. After their return to Iran, these intellectuals attempted to adopt some of the political as well as cultural ideologies of reform to the Iranian context. Western-style theatre and drama was considered an influential venue for social and cultural awakening and advancements. A number of bookshops played significant roles in making the translated versions of these plays plus original works in English and French available to artists and intellectuals. It was through these translations that Western terms such as scene, comedy, musical, theatral, operetta and so forth entered *taqlid*, which made the later form of *namayesh* disappear in the late 1930s. Around 1931, governmental authorities mandated that authors submit written drafts of plays to obtain permission to stage them. This went against the spirit of *taqlid*, which had its roots in stage

²¹⁷ . Gharibpour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)*, 67-70.

improvisation. Even then, writers only wrote the composition and sequence of the events because no one was able to draw the details of the story, which was the product of a process based on movement and interaction instead of the literary form of dialogue performed in the Western-style drama.²¹⁸

During the first two decades of the twentieth century the emergence of Western-style drama distanced *namayesh* from popular *taqlid* even though many aspects of *taqlid* were incorporated in drama. In 1910, for the first time Armenian women appeared in an adaptation of Moliere's *Tabib Ejbari* (*The Doctor in Spite of Himself*), performing in front of 250 men. Performers were all dressed in the seventeenth century European-style outfits but the subject addressed oppression of a woman both by her father and her husband.²¹⁹ The question of woman and her status within family and society, often treated in these new forms of *namayesh*, generated many debates among the male audience about men's oppressive behavior toward their wives and daughters and the denial of women's social and legal rights. Following these debates, in 1929, the opening of the Cyrus Theatre inside Zoroastrian Hall in Tehran welcomed women to appear in both Persian plays as well as European adaptations such as *Zan-e Gong* (*The Confused Woman*) by Anatole France and *Sonat Gerotz* by Tolstoy. Lala Vartoonian and D. Gyorgian played in *Mahyar* written by Ali Akbar Siasi. *Shab-e Hezar wa Yekom* (The Thousand and One Night) was brought on stage in 1930 where in addition to Lala, Molouk Zarrabi, who became a popular singer, and Pari Aqa Babayof performed. Women also appeared for the first time in *taqlid* in 1931. Theatre Sa'adat in Sarcheshmeh (Sa'adat Theatre) allowed a woman named Sharmali Gol to perform in *taqlid* for the first time. Other women such as Molouk Molavi and

²¹⁸ . Beyzai', *Namayesh dar Iran* (*Performane in Iran*), 178-81.

²¹⁹ . *Iran-e Naw* (*Iran Today*) 1, no. 1-6 (1908): 2.

Pari Galoubandaki followed in her footsteps and joined *taqlid* groups, but overall, women did not have success in their public appearances in front of male audience as *taqlid* artists.²²⁰

Unlike *ta'zieh* and *taqlid*, in which performers attempted to integrate music, words, and expressions in harmony, Western-style plays used an unfamiliar language which lacked appeal to the Iranian audience. Khan Malek Sasani described his impression of one of the plays this way: "...Plays were accompanied with music, even if there was no need for it, in order to attract the audience's attention in the tradition of *ta'zieh* and *taqlid*. The majority of people did not care about European music when it was played, but they would get excited and emotional when Persian music was played. The music also played the song written by 'Aref Qazvini. The play was one of the Moliere's works and music of 'Aref did not have anything to do with its subject."²²¹ It was during this process that the works of musicians and poets such as Mirzadeh 'Eshqi, Malek al-Sho'ara Bahar, 'Ali Akbar Sheyda, and Abolqassem 'Aref gained popularity and slowly took the form of independent public concerts, occasionally in the form of *namayesh*, taking place either in *tamasha khaneha* (theatre-halls) or inside houses on special occasions such as several charity concerts held by the Okhovat Association in Zahir al-Dawleh's house. Darwish Khan was the chief organizer of the concerts held by the Okhovat Association. He used the best singers and players as well as *tasnifha* by the famous poet 'Ali Akbar Sheyda, who was the most significant *tasnif saz* before 'Aref.²²² A pioneer in modern *tasnif sazi*, a popular form of

²²⁰ . Sami', "Az Zanpush ta Zan ((From Female Mimicry to Woman), 7-8, 10-1; 'Ali Mir Ansari & Seyyed Mehrdad Ziyayi', eds. *Gozideh Asnad Namayesh dar Iran (Collection of the Primary Documents of Performing Arts in Iran)* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Sazman-e Asnad-e Melli Iran, 2002).

²²¹ . Gharibpour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)*, 80.

²²² . Gharipour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)*, 77, 92-3. The first poet who transformed earlier forms of *tasnif* was Ali Akbar Sheyda, who occasionally also played tar. Sheyda introduced *delneshin* (sensational) melodies to *tasnif* and the story has it that the reason was his love for a dancing girl called Marzieh. Malek al-Sho'ara Bahar, Colonel 'Ali-Naqi Vaziri, Abolhassan Saba, and Ruh allah Khaleqi master poets and musicians followed 'Aref's

street poems opposite to classical *ghazal*, ‘Aref gave a different tone to *tasnif*, which at that time either pertained to stories of love or the life of princes and aristocrats. His working class origin played a role in this transformation because his *tasnifha* had their roots in people’s hearts as they told stories of the efforts and struggles of a suppressed nation. Similar to stories told in *taqlid*, *tasnif* addressed significant social, political, and cultural issues. He was a pioneer in creating nationalist *tasnif*.²²³

‘Aref was a child of the Constitutional Revolution and his *tasnif* made major contributions to the cause of the revolution by awakening the political consciousness of the masses. In his public concerts, poetry, inspired by the nationalist message of the Constitutional Revolution and the anti-colonial struggle and sacrifices of nationalist leaders and intellectuals, idealized an identity based on love of *vatan* (the fatherland) among the masses, replacing the pre-twentieth century categorical divisions based on ethnicity, religion, and class. Earlier *tasnif* emerged from popular subjects and did not follow literary rules or principles that later use of *tasnif* in music by literary masters in the arts of poetry and music attempted to produce. ‘Aref’s *tasnifha*, which often discussed daily political issues, passed from mouth to mouth and people, even children, sang them passionately on the streets and in the neighborhoods. His works included many songs and *tasnif* about a variety of subjects and people from Taj al-Saltaneh, the progressive daughter of Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the American financier Mr. Shuster to the independence of Armanistan and the rise of republican thoughts for a post-Qajar government. He began to compose a *tasnif* for the coronation of Reza Shah but did not finish it. His famous *tasnif*, *az khoon-e jawanan-e vatan laleh damideh* (a tulip has grow out of the blood of the

path in *tasnif sazi* but later transformations had brought separation between poet, singer, and composer. See Z. Khaleqi, *Awaye Mehrbani (The Sound of Kindness)*.

²²³ . Ibid.

country's youth) which was made during the turbulent years, became popular for its power of expression and effectiveness. 'Aref was sympathetic towards Seyyed Zia al-Din, the first minister in Reza Shah's cabinet, who promoted anti-aristocratic policies and the idea that Iran should become a republican government. He wrote a song for the fall of Seyyed Zia al-Din's cabinet, which occurred by the order of Reza Shah. 'After performing his last concert in 1924 in the memory of the freedom fighters 'Aref was exiled.²²⁴

These were among the first musical concerts held in Iran, which later inspired Qamar and other women singers of the interwar period. Concerts held by the Okhovat Association were private concerts with upper middle class audiences. Public concerts by Persian music masters such as Darwish Khan and 'Ali Akbar Shahnavaizi were later held at the Grand Hotel in Lalehzar Street, which was built on the site of Tamasha Khaneh Tehran.²²⁵ 'Aref Qazvini began his first public concerts, which included singing in 1915 at Baqerof Theatre. Among his early performances, concerts in memory of Colonel Mohammad Taqi Khan Pesyan (1922, 1923) and Concert *Jomhuri* (The Republic) (1924) in memory of Sattar Khan and Baqer Khan gained

²²⁴ . Ibid.

²²⁵ . The first *tamasha khaneha*, movie theatres, and hotels were built in Lalehzar Street in Tehran. Every evening, people showed up and hung out on this street, because in addition to buildings with impressive architectural designs and a number of luxurious shops, restaurants, and hotels, one could also enjoy watching men and women walking around dressed in the latest and the most beautiful fashion of the world. The first movie theatres, such as Khorshid, Iran, Mayak, Dariush, Sepah also emerged in this street and its surroundings. The Grand Hotel, which was built in that street, was among the most impressive buildings containing a café, shops, a ballroom, and a theatre hall convertible to a movie hall by changing curtains. The Grand Hotel also encouraged women to attend performances taking place there through advertisements. The Grand Cinema Lalehzar ad pointed out the special place assigned to women in the hall and their decision to rerun first and second parts of the show because of the presence of women. Women were allowed to enter from the Grand Cinema doors, whereas men were instructed to use the Grand Hotel doors. The ad also mentions that police will stop *zanhaye bieffat* (loose women) and *jawanhaye harzeh wa fased al-'aqideh* (immoral youth) from entering the place. Qamar performed her first concert in the Grand Hotel in 1924 in front of an audience of three thousand attending inside and outside the hotel. Ads from 1924 to 1940 include a number of other concerts she performed in the Grand Hotel and theatre halls and cafes in Tehran and other cities. The programs also mention concerts by male performers as well as dance by female artists. See Z. Khaleqi, Z. *Awaye Mehrbani (the Sound of Kindness)*, 76, 79.

popular fame.²²⁶ ‘Aref performed his concerts at the Grand Hotel, allowing masses from different social classes for the first time to freely attend. Qamar attended one of ‘Aref’s concerts in 1922 by hiding among Armenian women in the balcony since Muslim women were still avoiding public performances. It was also during this time that Qamar, similar to ‘Aref earlier, began her training in Persian *radif* and singing techniques of Persian *awaz* with *Ustad* (Master) Morteza Naydavood and the first series of musical records were produced. Qamar performed the majority of songs by ‘Aref and revitalized his rebellious voice. Qamar preserved the tradition of ‘Aref’s *tasnif khani* in terms of giving it vocal authority and the importance of poetry to the song. Qamar also dedicated the first award she received after performing her first public concert in the Grand Hotel to ‘Aref, who was living in exile then.²²⁷

The art of music after the ninth and tenth centuries C. E. lost the theoretical value that it had gained during the fourth and fifth centuries and in general artists gained bad reputations because of the association of their work with entertainment. The term *motreb* (entertainer) in Iranian culture has often been used to define people without professional skills or even without jobs. It was only during the Qajar dynasty and with Nasir al-Din Shah’s several trips to Europe that *motreb* began to gain some professional values. Although the term ‘*amaleh tarab* (literally means the laborer of entertainment) was used by Nasir al-Din Shah as a professional credit to artists the term ‘*amaleh* associated with low valued jobs still questioned that elevation. By the beginning of the twentieth century Persian music had gained a limited degree of independence

²²⁶ . Sattar Khan (1868-1914) and Baqer Khan (1870s-1911) well-known as *sardaran-e melli* (nationalist commanders) were two nationalist leaders from Azerbaijan who played important roles in the emergence of the 1906 Constitutional Revolution. They mobilized troops from different cities to fight against the forces of Mohammad Ali Shah and were successful in restoring the 1906 Constitution. Their refusal to disarm at the end caused them injuries and death.

²²⁷ . Z. Khaleqi, *Awaye Mehrbani (The Sound of Kindness)*; Rouhallah Khaleqi, *Sargozasht-e Musiqi Iran (The Story of the Music of Iran)* 3 vols. (Tehran: Entesharat-e Safialishah, 1999).

from the play with concerts either taking place in private houses and small *tamasha khaneha* where *namayesh* of *taqlid* or Western adaptations of theatrical plays were taking place, or performed in public *tamasha khaneha* and big theatre-halls as purely musical concerts. At the end of the Qajar period, in 1922, with the publication of *Dastur-e Tar-e Vaziri (Instruction of Tar of Vaziri)* along with the emergence of the professional schools Persian music began to regain some of the values that it had lost despite the different directions that it took.²²⁸

A new page opened in the history of the country when World War I ended and press, playwriting, *tasnif sazi*, and writing of nationalistic poems were developed and expanded as the result of the departure of Ahmad Shah to Europe, the fall of the Qajar dynasty, and the rise of Reza Shah as the leader of the country in 1925. Emergence of art schools for teaching Persian musical instruments, public halls such as the Grand Hotel for conducting musical concerts, establishment of the Advanced School of Music in 1923 and the Musical Club by Colonel 'Alinaqi Vaziri (1887-1979) for the purpose of training students promoted music to be considered a separate form of art. The Musical Club had a special evening concert for women, which was the first social music club for the entertainment of women. These were the wives of male members of the club. The Advanced School of Music slowly opened its door to other women who normally hesitated to frequent *tamasha khaneha* (theatre halls). Women who participated in the school's musical club later established *Jami'at Bidari-e Neswan* (The Women's Awakening Organization), which brought several plays on stage at Zoroastrian School. Other female celebrities such as Molouk Zarrabi and Banu Chehrazad were also active in this

²²⁸ . A. Khaleqi, *Awaye Mehrbani (The Sound of Kindness)*, 74-5.

organization.²²⁹ Advertisements from the press of the time demonstrated that musical concerts were becoming popular and accepted by the masses.

Egypt and the Rise of Popular Forms of Performance before the Nineteenth Century

Geographically located between Africa, Asia, and Europe, Egypt's history is marked by the development of several political and cultural systems. Ancient Egypt was a land of Pharaohs' domination and a polytheistic way of life. Islam came to Egypt in the seventh century C. E. Ummayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid as well as Ayyubid and Mamluk dynasties ruled there, and in 1517 came the Ottoman conquest by Sultan Selim I. Napoleon Bonaparte's French expedition occupied Egypt briefly from 1798-1801, but Britain became the long-term colonial occupier in 1882 and continued its domination even after the 1919 Egyptian Revolution for independence. Performance art reflected and was a reflection of this complex historical process. It addressed conflicting ideologies introduced at the intersection between aesthetics of "authenticity" and sociopolitical developments and the construction of religion, language, ethnic diversities, and national and colonial cultural manifestations. Gender and the emergence of women in performance art found a central place in this process during the interwar period.

The emergence of theatrical plays in Egypt has been associated with the ancient story of Isis and Osiris, the world's oldest theatrical production. However, Egyptian traditional popular theatre known to us as shadow plays and farces had strong ties with the Arabic language and classical Arabic literature. This form of theatre for centuries remained distant from developments in European forms of theatre, from the ancient Greek dramatic works to the secular drama of the Renaissance. It was only during the nineteenth century that Egyptians were significantly exposed to European theatrical and literary performance. The earliest form of

²²⁹ . Sami', "Az Zanzush ta Zan ((From Female Mimicry to Woman)," 9-10.

theatrical entertainment in ancient Egypt was “passion plays.” However, the oldest form of popular theatrical entertainment was *al-zar*. In *al-zar*, magical chants and dances were used to expel the demon from an individual’s soul, often a woman, which had caused him/her mental and/or physical illness. In *al-zar*, the ending point of the drama conveyed an intense moment of the performance. Its original form existed in Ethiopia and later was imported to Egypt. Itself an art form deriving from the genre of storytelling, several other forms of the same genre later followed *Al-zar*. *Al-hakawati* or *al-rawiya* (the narrator) presented one form of the storytellers, often “accompanied by *al-rabbaba*, a one- or two-string instrument played with a bow.” Movements by the narrator, as a visual element, added to the goal of transferring the story to the audience. In *al-hakawati*, improvisation and the art of narration were important instead of reading from texts, because it relied on the interaction with and response from the audience. Since the stories were memorized by *al-hakawati* and passed from generation to generation, literacy of the narrator was not important. *Al-hakawati* often developed through additional stories based on the storyteller’s imagination. Similar to the Iranian art of *naqqali*, the audience played important role in deciding on the destiny of the heroes narrated in the story. The wise *al-hakawati* was sensitive to the reaction of the audience and desires of influential individuals, and often “weigh[ed] his chances in choosing the faction that he could safely please.”²³⁰ *Al-hakawati* also performed in private festivities in homes or cafes. *Sunduq al-dunya* (the box of the world) was another form of storytelling, where a box, containing several colored paintings, was used by the storyteller to illustrate his story. The viewer covered his head with a black cloth

²³⁰ . Muhammad A. I. Murshid, “The Modern Theatre in Egypt with Special Reference to Melodrama, (1789-1956)” (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 1980), 8-9.

and looked through a large lens. *Al-hakawati's* voice was heard simultaneously, but the sound of *al-rabbaba* was excluded.²³¹

Post-Islamic religious storytelling performers were called *al-maddahin* (the chanters). A group of four to twelve artists formed *al-maddahin*, and produced a play in which they would chant the narrative as a chorus and the solo singer would use daily life objects such as headdress, stick, and veil to represent the role they intended to play. Because women were not welcome to perform in public, *al-maddahin* usually took the part ascribed to women using a veil as their symbolic representation. *Khayal al-zill* (shadow puppet performance), another form of popular performance, involved colored doll-like figures cut out of leather or thin paper moved behind a linen screen against the lights of lamps. It was accompanied with the voices of *al-mukhayyilatiyya* (the players) telling the story along with the characters' movements. This form of shadow play was closer to modern European theatre, involving an individual who is engaged in acting and expressing the feelings and actions of another individual. Because of the special skill of *al-mukhayyilatiyya* in performing multiple physical and emotional tasks, from moving the dolls and singing to drawing upon his own feelings to master the impersonation of the doll, these performers were likened to God, "as the sole mover of creation." This form of performance was closer to the arts of modern theatre. Shams al-Din Muhammad B. Danyal (1238-1811 A.D) was a famous shadow theatre artist, who used the literary genre of *al-maqamat* (Arabic prose in didactic verses with decorative style) in his plays with a few modifications. Audiences enjoyed Danyal's simpler blending of classical and colloquial Egyptian Arabic and the elimination of the highly decorative style of writing in his plays. His first and famous work *Taif al-Khayal* (Phantom from Fantasy) tells the story of a "range of sexual experiences and

²³¹ . Ibid., 9-10.

imaginary of many sins,” of two individuals who then go to the Holy Land to repent. *Al-mukhayyilatiyya* performance was a very powerful popular form of theatrical art with tremendous influence on the masses. Its political aspect caused authorities to ban its performances on many occasions.²³²

Al-karaguz was derived from *Qaragush*, the best-known warrior and official of Sultan Salah al-Din (1179-93). However, its origin was said to be from Ottoman Turkey where the genre of *al-karaguz* was performed under the name of *qaragus* (the black eye). Egyptian artists developed this form of art into a distinctive play acceptable to their own audience. Its origin goes back to the Fatimid period.²³³ The puppets were usually placed behind a standing screen or curtain lighted with candles or sometimes within a theatrical frame.²³⁴ Before the play began, the main character greeted the audience, addressing the government and the subject of the piece.²³⁵ Although some performers used texts, containing outlines of the plays, “the player” mostly “improvised both the dialogue and the action to suit his particular audience.”²³⁶ In the puppet show, the performer hid in a wooden box, displaying the puppets through holes in the box and moving them with brass wires attached to the lid. The performer used a distorted voice for the dialogue among the puppets. There were numerous physical and colloquial interactions

²³² . Ibid., 10-3.

²³³ . P.C. Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)* (Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 1996), 12; Bahram Beyzai’ refers to Adolf Talaso who traces the roots of original *al-karagoz* (from the land of Turks), which appeared later in Iran and Turkey, and considers *pahlevan kachal* (the bold hero), the Iranian shadow play as the ancestor of *al-karaguz*. See Beyzai’, *Namayesh dar Iran (Performane in Iran)*, 99.

²³⁴ . Murshid, “The Modern Theatre in Egypt with Special Reference to Melodrama, (1789-1956),” 13; Hamdi ‘Abdel ‘Aziz, *Al Masrah al-Misri al-Hadith (The Narrative of Theatre of Egypt)* (Cairo: Al-Hai’a al-‘Ammal lil Qusur al-Thaqafa, 1998).

²³⁵ . Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 14.

²³⁶ . Murshid, “The Modern Theatre in Egypt with Special Reference to Melodrama, (1789-1956),” 13.

between puppets. European sources recorded many farce performances as means of social critique and mockery of ruling class authorities and misuse of power against peasants by enforcing heavy taxes, stealing land, and committing violence and imprisonment. The plays also exposed religious conflicts, and social conflicts between wives and husbands. They were performed during festivities attended by Muhammad Ali (1805-48), Khedive Ismail (1863-79), and Khedive Abbas II (1892-1914). At the festival of *al-muwalid al-nabawi* (the Prophet's birthday), or *mahmal* (an annual ceremony for delivery of a new covering for the Kaaba by the caravan from Cairo to Mecca), figures of the smart clown and joker of *al-karaguz* played central roles. The artist used a language of satire, mocking people from all social strata, sex, and ages. They used as their hero Emir Karakus, the right hand man of Salah al-Din. Mockery of government authorities including judges, the colonial sense of superiority symbolized by the figure of a European artist, and men's oppression of women in the form of arbitrary divorce were all part of one *al-karaguz* performed on the occasion of *muwalid*.²³⁷

Karaguz performers were also invited to domestic ceremonies such as circumcisions or marriages during *laylat al-henna* (the night of henna or wedding night). They performed in the Turkish language and the Egyptian dialect using satire to criticize social and political problems. *Dervish* celebrations on the occasion of *al-muwalid al-nabawi* took place near the house of the Naqib al-Sadat al-Bakriya, the chief of *Sufi* confraternities.²³⁸ Traveling groups of performers were also popular in pre-nineteenth century Egypt. Farcical performances or *awlad al-Rabiya*

²³⁷ . Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 16.

²³⁸ . Sufism is a mystical interpretation of Islam as "a quest for unity with the divine being." Sufist followers "sought to order their lives, channel their thoughts and feelings, and hone a language" to transform the transcendentalism and inaccessibility of God into a direct experience of the presence. Sufism was "an effort to overcome the divided self, to realize the truths by which life must be lived, and to attain wholeness of being." It was cultivated through the practice of reciting *Quran*, *dhikr* (the remembrance of God and repetition of his name) coupled with meditation as "the struggle to subdue bad impulses and to suppress inner vices" in order "to free the deepest capacities of the soul and to prepare it for the vision of God." See Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 109.

(the son of Rabiya) known as *arbab al-malaib* (actors) and *ahl al-malahi* (the entertainment people), presented by traveling performers, were observed by the eighteenth century Egyptian Muslim scholar Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, as amusing entertainment for people.²³⁹

Al-muhabbazin was a traveling group of performers who used a language of social criticism in their plays. No information is found about the origin of *al-muhabbazin*, but it appears that it was performed in Mamluk courts (1250-1517). Their skill in the theatre of improvisation was unique and sometimes they included titles for their scenes. Players were a combination of Muslims, Christians, and Jews, and the topic of abuse of religious and ethnic minorities was popular. Attention was paid mostly to humor as a means of critical satire instead of plot or character development. The earliest recorded examples of *al-muhabbazin* go back to 1815, based on a reference by the Italian explorer Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778-1823), who watched the plays *The Rider and the Camel* and *The Foreigner and the Poor Arab*, performed during a wedding ceremony in Shubra. Both plays used a sharp critical “attack on the rich mercantile class and their lack of conscience.”²⁴⁰ British Orientalist Edward William Lane (1801-1876) also reported on the art of *al-muhabbazin*:

The Egyptians are often amused by players of low and ridiculous farces, who are called *Mohabbazeen*... Their performances are scarcely worthy of descriptions: it is chiefly by vulgar jests, and indecent actions. That they amuse and obtain applause. The actors are only men and boys; the part of a woman being always performed by a man or a boy in female attire.²⁴¹

He also mentioned the presence of Muhammad Ali (1805-1848) at the circumcision ceremony for one of his grand-children. The play combined humoristic scenes with the suffering

²³⁹ . Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 18.

²⁴⁰ . Murshid, “The Modern Theatre in Egypt with Special Reference to Melodrama, (1789-1956),” 13-5.

²⁴¹ . Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 19.

of a farmer who was put in jail because of his refusal to pay multiple taxes. The clerk appeared as Christian, and the *fellah*'s (peasant's) wife was given a central role for talking about women's oppression and the connection between power and sexuality. These plays contained more talk than action. Muhammad Ali's presence at the ceremony and his special attention to the play confirms the skills of the performers as well as the popularity of *al-muhabbazin* at the time. Music always accompanied these popular performances. As spatially non-bounding performances, these plays encouraged interactions between artists and the audience. Stories of daily life were told and sung in a language of blended classical and colloquial Egyptian Arabic, comprehensible to the masses, and were used by Egyptian artists to mirror the audience's feeling of frustration and struggle against constructed social and familial norms, ruling class misuse of power, and religious, class, and ethnic conflicts.²⁴²

As we observed earlier, in addition to storytelling, improvisation, and critical satire, music formed an important part of the popular performances from *al-hakawati* to *al-karaguz*, *al-muhabbazin*, and *Sufi* rituals of *dervishes*. Before World War I, male vocalists were trained in *Sufi* tradition as they learned signing techniques by participating in the musical rituals of the *dervishes*, "especially those belonging to the *laythi* order."²⁴³ They usually carried the religious title *shaykh* before their names because of their religious education and backgrounds. *Mashayikh* could read Quran, memorize *fushe* (literature and poetry in classical Arabic), and sing religious songs on different occasions. They could have become scholars in the prestigious al-Azhar University or teachers in a small village such as Umm Kulthum's father. "*Mashayikh* represented a particular kind of learning having to do with the language, law, history and culture

²⁴² . Ibid.,; Murshid, "The Modern Theatre in Egypt with Special Reference to Melodrama, (1789-1956)."

²⁴³ . Racy, "Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932," 47.

of Arabs and Muslims” which defined the essence of Egyptian culture in the face of the cultural incursions of the various foreign powers present in the country, whether Turkish, Persian, European, or American.”²⁴⁴

Performers with *min al-mashayikh*- or *Sufi*-tradition backgrounds expressed Egyptian authenticity (*al-asala*) in music, particularly in the sense of having connections with and sensitivity to Egyptian common and rural populations. The distinctive characteristic of *mashayikh* lies in their unique stylistic trait of creating a colorful link between the text and the melody in such a way that “[T]he sound of the words permeates the melodic line.”²⁴⁵ In the tradition of reciting Quran, the solo vocalist was to use “the very sound of the language to convey specific meaning,” which “not only the image of the metaphor but also the sound of the words which express that image are perceived to converge with the meaning.” The performer embellishes the sound in a way confluent with the meaning to create *taswir al-ma’na* “(the depiction, shaping or heightening of the meaning or the idea of the text)” which aimed “to enhance the listener’s awareness and understanding of the deeper meaning of the text.”²⁴⁶

To achieve that goal, accomplished *mashayikh* had to use a “wide variety of frontal resonances” including *ghunnah* (closed nasality) which consisted of “nasality, sweetness, and melodiousness.”²⁴⁷ The solo vocalist also led accompanists who played a more important role in the rendition than instruments. These stylistic and social attributions of the oral tradition of *mashayikh* added to improvisation, storytelling, and critical satire of popular performances of the

²⁴⁴ . Virginia Danielson, “‘*Min al-Mashayikh*’: A View of Egyptian Musical Tradition,” *Asian Music* 22, no. 1 (Autumn 1990-Winter 1991): 123; Abdel Hamid Tawfiq Zakki, *Al-Tazuq al-Musiqi wa Tarikh al-Musiqi al-Misriyya (Genres of Musiq and the History of Egyptian Music)* (Cairo: Al-Hai’a al-Misriyya al-‘Amma, 1995).

²⁴⁵ . Danielson, “‘*Min al-Mashayikh*’, 120.

²⁴⁶ . Ibid., 120.

²⁴⁷ . Ibid., 120.

nineteenth century from *al-karaguz* and *al-muhabbazin* to the ritual performances of the *Sufi dervishes*, molded the performer both as the product and the producer of the trajectory between artistic tradition and society's culture. As the contact point both for the masses and for the aristocracy, the performer was able to create that trajectory through formation of a sense of imagined identity for himself and the masses, as well as the upper class community.

Before the nineteenth century, the trajectory between artistic tradition and society's culture through popular performances of *khayal al-zill*, *al-karaguz*, and *al-muhabbazin*, with their stylistic elements of storytelling, improvisations, critical satire, and the musical teaching of *al-mashayikh*, placed the performer at the crossroad of ethnic, religious, and class identity formation. The process of national and individual identity formation mirrored in performance through the figure of the artist went through a major transformation at the beginning of the twentieth century by shifting the attention towards the presence of women and female artistic forms in public as the core of the formation of an "essential Egyptian" art and an authentic (*al-asala*) culture. Although women's issues were at the heart of the pre-nineteenth century's farce plays, women except for female dancers did not take a part in playing their roles in public. Unlike ethnicity, religion, and class, gender, as a social category defining public spheres of performance in terms of identity was not created because of women's seclusion from public performances.

European Influences, Musical Theatre, and Female Repertoire of *Taqtuqa* During the 1920s

Although women appeared as an audience at public performances of *al-karaguz* and *al-muhabbazin*, they were not given a place in playing their roles in these performances. Men and boys instead played women's roles. Popular forms of performance for women during nineteenth

century were singing, dancing, poetry reading, or playing a musical instrument within private settings at festivities such as weddings, saint's days, *al-muwalid al-nabawi*, *al-muwalid al-Hussein* (birthday of Imam Hussein), *subus* (baby naming) and circumcisions. However, groups of female dancers and entertainers known as *ghawazi* "performed unveiled in the streets and in front of coffeehouses" on the occasions of saint's day or *muwalid* festivities. They were Muslims and Egyptian Arabic-speaking women who mostly migrated from one village or city to another, but they also had their own quarters. In their performances they sometimes also used objects such as scarves, sticks, and vases or lighted candles carried on their heads. Because of their unveiled public appearances and unconventional behavior such as smoking water pipes or drinking brandy they were not considered respectable women. Some *ghawazi* also added singing to their performances and performed short skits of love stories.²⁴⁸ In one such a performance called the Bee Dance, the dancer took off her clothes, pretending to be bitten by a bee.²⁴⁹

Another group, *'awalim*, were learned women who wrote poetry, composed music, and sang. They were specialized in women's vocal repertoire, *taqtuqa*, although having skills in the male repertoire, the classical forms of *qasidah* (classical poetry), was considered desirable.²⁵⁰ Although *'awalim* danced, only for women, and played instruments to accompany their songs, their major skill was in their improvisatory songs. *'Awalim* possessed a beautiful voice and gained fame through their use of a fluid language, mastery of poetry, and composing couplets. They were highly valued for their arts, and the act of being veiled in public. Al-Hajja al-Suwaisiyya, a female performer during the nineteenth century who moved from "her home

²⁴⁸ . van Nieuwkerk, "A Trade Like Any Other," 27.

²⁴⁹ . Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 17.

²⁵⁰ . Mitchell, A., *Women of Egypt, 1924, 1931*.

region of Suez to Port Said and eventually to Cairo” wore “a *malaya* (a long black wrap), a head covering, and a face veil” when she performed with her brother, husband, and son as her accompanists. “She sang regularly at a coffeehouse called Monsieur Antoine near ‘Ataba in the center of the city.”²⁵¹ Some talented ‘*awalim* lived in the royal palace, but they also had their different quarters such as the alley of ‘*awalim* in the Bab a-Khalq neighborhood. When they performed inside the harem, a special elevated place open to the courtyard was assigned to ‘*awlim* where they could only be heard but not seen. When men were present, ‘*awalim* performed behind a wooden lattice screen.²⁵²

Originally from a Lebanese family, Almaz was born in Alexandria, came under the patronage of Khedive Isma’il, and performed in private parties. She was a professional singer comparable to males in the same profession. She married her competitor, ‘Abduh al-Hamuli, “pioneer musician, singer, and composer” who “adapted Turkish motifs into Arabic vocal music.”²⁵³ Almaz performed in private parties. Wadudah al-Manyalawiyya and Sakinah Hasan also mastered classical and religious repertoires.²⁵⁴ Sakinah Hasan was skilled in singing *qasidah* and she recorded three Quranic chants with Odeon in 1928.²⁵⁵ ‘*Awalim* had their own trade guild and made contracts with individual patrons for particular ceremonies. Al-Hajja Huda, the daughter of a miller who lived in the Muski neighborhood of Cairo, was the leader of the guild of ‘*awalim* in the early twentieth century. Her three daughters later became ‘*awalim*.

²⁵¹ . Danielson, “Artists and Entrepreneurs: Female Singers in Cairo during the 1920s,” 293.

²⁵² . van Nieuwkerk, “*A Trade Like Any Other.*”

²⁵³ . Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000), 70.

²⁵⁴ . Racy, “Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932,” 49.

²⁵⁵ . Mitchell, A. *Women of Egypt, 1924, 1931*, 14; Qustandi Rizq, ed., *Al-Musiqi al-Sharqiyya wa al-Ghina’ al-Arabi* (*The Music of the East and Arab Songs*) (Cairo: Al-Matba’a al-Asriyya, 1936).

Fathiya, Mufida, and Ratiba Ahmad, three sisters who gained popularity for their singing skills during the 1920s and owned their own *sala*, were nieces of Bamba Kashshar, a famous ‘*awalim*.²⁵⁶ Most of these artists were Muslim but a few Christian and Jewish women also became ‘*awalim*. Born in Cairo, most of these women came from working-class families. Socio-political transformations of the country after the arrival of Europeans changed the distinct status of ‘*awalim*, as skilled experts of Arabic songs who avoided being visible in public. Shift in the status of ‘*awalim* at the beginning of the twentieth century was slowly followed by their total disappearance.²⁵⁷

Unlike Iran and because of the colonial occupation, Europeans’ direct interventions in many areas of Egyptians’ cultural and political life including artistic performances began with the French invasion of Egypt in 1798. Not only interested in Egypt’s agriculture and trade, Napoleon’s expeditionary troupe also established French amateur theatres called The Theatre of the Republic and Arts and a Club in the *al-Uzbakiyya* Garden for the entertainment of the French colonial forces. *Al-Azhar* scholar al-Jabarti points out the arrival of *al-kumidi* (*the Comedie Francaise*) in Cairo, where it performed in the *al-Uzbakiyya* garden for French soldiers. Contrary to the conservative *al-Azharis*, al-Jabarti did not refuse depiction of Islamic saints and the Prophet. But he was against imitating European forms of theatre in totality, as some Egyptian leaders and aristocrats wanted to do. Napoleon’s expedition left Egypt in 1801, but his legacy lived on long after his departure. Muhammad Ali initiated many projects for modernization, including the areas of education, the press, and the military, as well as offering

²⁵⁶ . Danielson, “Artists and Entrepreneurs: Female Singers in Cairo during the 1920s,” 294.

²⁵⁷ . van Nieuwkerk, “*A Trade Like Any Other.*”

government assistance to foreign visiting companies to perform operas and dramas in Cairo and Alexandria and to develop European style performances.²⁵⁸

Muhammad Ali followed a policy of state monopolies, new taxes, and control of agricultural production, laying the foundation for a “more active interventionist state,” followed by his successors.²⁵⁹ The Arabic printing press founded in Bulaq in 1819-20 initially was used by pro-European style theatre advocates instead of Egyptian masses in writing contemporary Arabic literary works or translations of European texts. Various forms of performances influenced by the European style plays, including operettas, comedies, farces and vaudevilles were performed in many theatre-halls established or managed by Europeans. European style comedies and farces did not gain popularity among Egyptians as the opera did. After the establishment of European theatres Egyptian writers created a form of farce in French and Italian with Arabic themes. These works came under close scrutiny by the Khedive Isma’il’s government. The languages used in these comedies were Italian and French, which primarily excluded native Egyptians from attending.²⁶⁰

Marun al-Naqqash (1817-55), a Syrian merchant who wrote poems, loved music, and mastered classical Arabic was interested in adapting European theatre for Arabic-speaking audiences. In his musical comedy, *The Miser*, he translated the text and transferred the characters and their situations into an Arabic context but left the idea, the plot, and the construction of the humor untouched. He presented this play in a hall attached to his house.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ . Racy, “Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932.”

²⁵⁹ . van Nieuwkerk, “*A Trade Like Any Other*,” 30.

²⁶⁰ . Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 3-4.

²⁶¹ . Racy, “Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932.”; Nevill Barbour, “The Arabic Theatre,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London*, 8, no. 1 (1935): 173-87.

During the early nineteenth century, the number of female singers and dancers increased as a result of the arrival of Europeans. Napoleon's initiative to get women out of their houses for accessibility to the French later became a strong reason for the Egyptian government to put a ban in 1834 against the independent trade guilds which coordinated public performances of women in Cairo. Affected by the ban, heavy taxes on women entertainers, and 'ulema's opposition to women's singing and dancing, 'awalim were not able to keep their initial artistic value and rich skills, and ultimately lost their major distinctions from *ghawazi*.²⁶² The disappearance of 'awalim from the Egyptian private and semi-public performing arts scene generated the process of integration of female artists and their artistic skills into newly emerging styles of music and theatrical performances. These were framed within the cultural and political reformist policies of Egyptian authorities and the intelligentsia, under the influence of modern Western cultural performances of drama, operas, and vaudeville.

European cultural influences in Egypt, however, were not as significant as the impact of ideologies of reform which Egyptian intellectuals such as Rifa' Rafi' al-Tahtawi (1801-73), Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1904), Muhammad Ibrahim al-Muwaylihi (1868-1930), and Taha Husayn (1889-1973) advanced after they traveled to Europe. The idea that theatre and performance, in Western style, could be used to elevate mass consciousness in Egypt gained value among this group. Pre-World War I events also contributed to strengthening that theory. Economic prosperity in the late nineteenth century opened the path for the emergence of an urban middle class, replacing the traditional professional guilds, including the entertainment guild. During Isma'il's reign (1863-79), the number of public schools increased from 185 to 4817. The number of students who were educated in foreign schools inside Egypt also increased

²⁶² . van Nieuwkerk, "A Trade Like Any Other."

rapidly. This replaced, in part, the traditional religious system of education with new secular training. Isma'il also revived the process of sending students to Europe and "began the process of turning female education into a responsibility of the state."²⁶³

The emergence of an educated class of women and the influence of the pro-Western ideology of modernism placed the question of woman at the center of social debates. The writings of scholars such as Qasim Amin (1863-1908) and Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905), advocating the elevation of the status of Egyptian women through secular education, spread widely among the middle- and upper-class Egyptians. Although these debates originally did not address the veiling of women, by the beginning of the 1920s many women appeared unveiled in the cities and social gatherings. The increase in the number of women who emerged in public, in politics, journalism, and the arts after World War I was tied to these socio-political transformations of the late nineteenth century. By the early 1920s, Muslim women slowly began to attend the theatre as well as to perform on the stage at the newly emerged theatre-halls.²⁶⁴ For example, women often appeared as solo vocalists in a *mutrib al-takht* (singer with small *takht* ensemble) during the intermissions of many European style theatrical plays performed in the new theatre- and concert-halls.²⁶⁵ Some were *'awalim* who had performed earlier in the century in coffeehouses, family ceremonies, and royal courts.

The rise of the educated middle class during the late nineteenth century made the revival of classical Arabic significant, advancing the Arabic press and publishing. Translations of foreign books into Arabic increased, as did press debates about the growing spirit of nationalism.

²⁶³ . William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 95.

²⁶⁴ . Racy, "Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932," 65.

²⁶⁵ . Mitchell, A., *Women of Egypt, 1924, 1931*, 3; Racy, "Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932," 52-4.

The question of cultural revitalization in the area of performance reflected and was the reflection of these socio-political transformations. The newly emerged group of middle class, educated, and nationalist Egyptians were raising the problem of identity in crisis. The discourse about art focused on the question of *al-jidida wa al-qidima* (the old and the new), and the debate about appropriating certain aspects of European elements while keeping and developing traditional Arab flavors. The debates addressed the areas of language and music in Egyptian popular plays, which went through a drastic change. For example, Rifa' Rafi' al-Tahtawi (1801-73) introduced the words *tiyatire* (theatre) and *sbiktakle* (spectacle) from French into Arabic while observing many similarities between French actors and actresses and Egyptian *'awalim* and *dervishes*.²⁶⁶ Shifts in the content and language of the plays changed the earlier improvisatory interactions between the artist and the audience, ultimately impacting the style. Because of their use of excessive sexual and comic echoes and shocking language, Muslim leaders considered farce and *karaguz* performances harmful and immoral. The government also suppressed various forms of popular satire, replacing it with operas. Under pressure, both from Europeans and Egyptian elites, *karagoz* was banned in Cairo in 1908.²⁶⁷

After the 1880s, under the European influences and motivated by the Egyptian new urban middle class intelligentsia who favored *al-jidida*, performance art taking place in public theatre-halls and night clubs appealed significantly to the audience. Journals and newspapers such as *al-Misrah* (The Theater) wrote critical pieces about theatre, acting and related topics. Along with the government's instructions on limiting the performance of popular theatre on streets and in coffeehouses and control of women's performances in public through direct and indirect policies,

²⁶⁶ . Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 35.

²⁶⁷ . Ibid.

emphasis on music as a profession distinct from the traditional class of guild entertainers such as the *'awalim*, was popularized through different venues. At the beginning of the twentieth century in Cairo, musicians appeared in a variety of forms including concert entertainers, solo performers, players of European instruments, military band musicians, and large musical-theatrical troupes. Learning to play an instrument, either Egyptian or European, was encouraged among the elites, while articles appeared in the press addressing music as a field of scholarship enhanced with theory and aesthetics. For example, piano was viewed as a “prominent manifestation of cultural change” when in the post-war era it gained popularity among Egyptian women and girls. While learning to play the piano “was viewed as a status symbol...in middle class homes,” playing this instrument for their husbands and guests was a “valuable asset” for a married woman.²⁶⁸ Wide exploration of books on music gained popularity and while Egyptians were encouraged to read European publications, scholars also discovered a number of Egyptian books written centuries before on teaching different musical instruments.²⁶⁹

During the first three decades of the twentieth century a number of books by Egyptians were published on musical theory and methods. The most influential book in 1904 was *Kitab al-Musiqā al-Sharqī* (The Book of Eastern Music), written by the composer and theorist Kamil al-Khulai' (1879-1938). In 1907, Mansur Awa, an Egyptian composer and instrumentalist, and Sami al-Shawwa, a violinist originally from Aleppo, established a private music school, which initiated formal education in music by changing from the previous oral method of instruction to

²⁶⁸ . Racy, “Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932,” 63-65.

²⁶⁹ . The following treatises were published: ‘Abd al-Hamid Nafoi on how to teach *qanun*, Muhammad Hashim about teaching the *nay*, and Muhammad Dkakhir for teaching *'ud*. See Racy, “Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932,” 36.

the European-style conservatory.²⁷⁰ In 1931, the first music course was added to the curriculum for both male and female students in public schools. Ma'had al-Musiqā al-Sharqī (The Academy of Music of the East) was also established in Cairo. The European notation system was also used, despite its inappropriateness for Egyptian music, which had neutral intervals. Artistic reform à la Western style after World War I reached the point that criticism appeared against those who still taught “Middle Eastern music aurally” instead of using notation and against those who “rel[ie]d upon ‘inadequate traditional practices’ such as playing by ear and having the instruments merely imitate the singer’s voice.”²⁷¹ Gender and sexuality as a discourse was also embedded within these debates when pro-Western advocate Salama Musa made associations between “Egyptian popular songs,” “latent eroticism,” and “feministic masochism.” Criticism was also pointed at “audiences’ vulgar conduct during concerts” as a sign of disrespect for music and musicians.²⁷²

During the nineteenth century, *‘Alatiyyah* (male singers equivalent to *‘awalim*) appeared in small *takht* ensembles, performing *waslah* (stretch), a male oriented repertoire, which was a lengthy *maqamat* (melody/scale) with several sequences of vocal and instrumental numbers. A concert, which usually lasted three or four hours, consisted normally of three *waslah* (connector/stretch) with intermissions incorporating both improvisatory and pre-composed genres. *Waslah* incorporated many different musical genres such as *dawr* (evolved from *taqtuqa*, a metric, semi-improvised vocal genre in Egyptian dialect), *qasidah* (classical and medieval Arabic poetry), *muwashshahat* (a vocal genre rooted in Hispano-Arabic medieval

²⁷⁰ . Ibid., 37.

²⁷¹ . Ibid., 35-42.

²⁷² . Ibid., 43-4.

literary and musical, metric modes), *layali* (non-metric vocal syllables of “*ya layl*”), *mawwal* (a form derived from Egyptian folk “*baladi*” music), and *bashraf* and *samai* (Armenian-Turkish pieces).²⁷³ Although women were able to master males’ musical repertoires they were deprived of showcasing in public their talent in this area. Their specialties remained within *taqtuqa*, a female repertoire originated with ‘*awalim*. Those who succeeded in performing males’ musical repertoires in public had to hide their feminine biological sex. For example, the very young Umm Kulthum (1899-1975) performed with her father and brother in public male-oriented *Sufi* songs while wearing “a conservative male attire and headdress.”²⁷⁴

Among a number of theatrical genres, including tragedy, comedy, melodrama, musicals, and opera, which developed considerably both in recognition as art forms as well as in popularity with the audience at the beginning of the twentieth century, musical theatre found a special place in the hearts of the Egyptian masses. Musical theatre combined different elements of the Egyptian traditional forms of popular performance such as storytelling, semi-improvisatory narrative, colloquial Arabic, and music. As mentioned previously, Egyptian masses did not support the earlier Arabized versions of French dramas by Moliere or Corneille because of the lack of amusing and entertaining elements in those plays. It was during the early twentieth century that light theatrical plays, which used comic texts in colloquial Egyptian Arabic and included music and song, replacing the classical type of drama, were encouraged by Europeans. Artistic elements included in this form of play were closer to the earlier popular forms of Egyptian farces than adaptations of European dramas and this contributed to its success. This form of theatrical performance was part of a developmental process, taking place during the late nineteenth century, in which through the emergence of musical theatre “a considerable amount

²⁷³ . Ibid., 55-6.

²⁷⁴ . Ibid., 49.

of indigenous Middle Eastern musical material from the concert” was “transported onto the stage.”²⁷⁵

A group of immigrant Lebanese and Syrian actors and writers who found Egypt an appropriate place to try out their new art were influential in this task. Most of them sought patronage in the Khedive’s court, which gave them both financial and cultural support.²⁷⁶ However, the Khedives’ support of course placed limits on their ambitious plan to create an Egyptian form of play, as they constantly came under close scrutiny and censorship by Khedives who did not approve of social criticism in plays in place of adaptation of European style operas and musical plays. The *Urabi* Revolt in 1881 and arrival of the British, who took over the country after the defeat of the revolt, forced these artists to depart Egypt and leave their work and interest in Egyptian theatre unfulfilled.²⁷⁷

Prominent Egyptian singer and composer Salama Hijazi (1852-1912) was a pioneer who combined *qasidah*, which was one of the musical genres of traditional *waslah*, the *takht* ensemble, and non-conventional collective songs such as the march and *salam* (salutation) in his play. He was born in Alexandria and became a *mue’zzin* (caller to prayer) and a singer of poetry at *muwalids* and other private occasions, because of his good voice. Later he became interested in theatre and began his career with Syrian Suleiman al-Qurdahi, first appearing on stage in

²⁷⁵ . Ibid., 67.

²⁷⁶ . Ibid.

²⁷⁷ . Considered the “first nationalist hero,” Ahmad ‘*Urabi*, an army officer from a peasant background, mobilized a group of fellow Egyptian officers to protest against the law which prohibited fellahs (peasants) to rise to the position of an officer. The small protest turned into a nationalist and anti-European domination movement in Egypt. He rose to the position of ministry of war in 1882, but British considered him a treat and defeated him and ended the revolt. ‘*Urabi* movement intended to both cease the intervention of foreign forces in Egypt as well as to limit Khedive’s authority and his state expenditures and debts through constitutional policies. See Albert Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

1880 singing between acts and at the end of the performance.²⁷⁸ Hijazi worked with Iskandar Farah's theatrical company for 18 years and in 1904 formed his own special singing company, Dar al-Tamthil al-'Arabi (The Home of Arabic Acting) next to the al-Uzbakiyya Gardens. Hijazi sang and composed music for the adaptation of foreign plays by Shakespeare, Hugo, and Dumas, introducing melodies in the play modified according to audience preferences. Hijazi selected his *maqamat* and *aw'zan* (loosely associated with specific moods) based on theatrical contents. He intended to introduce plays which could contain social and moral views accentuated with Egyptian culture. He complained of the absence of "Egyptian" plays from the Arabic theatre. Although he wanted to be more associated with theatre, the masses admired him more as a composer and singer.²⁷⁹ In his *Sidq al-Ikha* (The Sincerity of Brotherhood), Hijazi used many nationalistic lines such as: "If we were united, the foreigners would not have invaded us." He made sense of the use of music in plays by turning it into a central part of theatrical performance. His particular attention to music as a vital part of the play conveyed his awareness of the value of continuity of the Egyptian cultural and artistic heritage in the elevation of European style theatre, which he also loved.²⁸⁰

It was during this time that the first step was taken to include women as part of the performing group. For example, in 1882, the Syrian Sulaiman al-Qurdahi organized a troupe out of the troupe of al-Khayyat with shaykh Salamah Hijazi as its new member. In *Zifaf 'Antar* (*The Wedding of 'Antar*), in addition to a female singer called Leila, Al-Qurdahi chose his wife, Christine, to play the part of 'Antar's beloved cousin, 'Abla, contrary to the usual practice of

²⁷⁸ . Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 157; Fawad Rashid, *Tarikh al-Masrah al-Arabi (History of the Arab Theatre)* (Cairo: Shirkit al-'Elanat al-Sharqiyya, 1960).

²⁷⁹ . Barbour, "The Arabic Theatre," 177.

²⁸⁰ . Racy, "Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932."

having a man play that role. Al-Qardahi gave more parts to women in his plays.²⁸¹ The emergence of women in theatre during the late nineteenth century was followed after the 1910s by many female performers, such as Munira al-Mahdiyya, Fathiyya Ahmad, Na'ima al-Misriyya, Badi'a Masabni, and Umm Kulthum, who turned their work into a high-standard profession by integrating many theatrical and musical innovations with the conventional artistic styles, managing theatres, commissioning music and plays, and composing. Some women performers started off their career by entering the female artistic guild of *'awalim*, then joining a nightclub or a theatrical company, and finally opening their own *sala*. An example was Shafi'a al-Ibtiyya, born in a working class neighborhood in Cairo, who first entered the female artistic guild of *'awalim*, moved later to the Eldorado nightclub, and finally opened her *sala* Alf Lela, which was visited by the aristocracy because of the high artistic quality of her work.²⁸² Badi'a Masabni, sisters Insaf and Ratiba Rushdi, Meri Mansur, Munira al-Mahdiyya, and Beba were female performers of the 1920s who owned *sala* in Cairo. They were able to change their earlier working class status and claim fame as stage celebrities despite social disapproval of artists and the taboos placed on them regarding marriage, family, and social status.

Badi'a's *sala* was the most well-known nightclub in which singers and dancers such as Fathiyya Ahmad, Hikmat Fahmi, Beba and Samia Gamal performed. She conducted a six o'clock matinee for women every Tuesday in her *sala*. She was a "keen and tough business woman." Fathiyyah Ahmed started her career in 1910s in Naguib al-Rihani's and Amin Sidqi's troupes. She became the shining star of the *takht* ensemble performance after she traveled to Syria and lived there for a few years. She introduced many Turkish and *ajami* (non-Arabic)

²⁸¹ . Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 159.

²⁸² . van Nieuwkerk, "A Trade Like Any Other," 43.

pieces to her performances, and won the heart and soul of her audience as the *mutribah al-qatrayn* (singer of the two regions, Egypt and Syria).²⁸³ Themes in songs performed by these artists included stories of love, fate, success, and solitude, which occasionally reflected the personal life and suffering of the artist herself. Such was the case with Fatimah Sirri and her painful story of love with Mohammed Sha'arawi (son of Huda Sha'arawi), who denied Fatima's claim that he fathered her daughter.²⁸⁴

Socio-political factors after World War I, especially the transformation of the society after the political turmoil of 1919, had major impacts on changing the musical tastes in Egypt. Appreciation for elaborate improvisatory performances declined. In addition, the multi-directional genre of *waslah* as a destabilizing element in its future unity allowed for different musical ingredients to function outside *waslah*. This was also the time when Egyptian musicians introduced new *maqamat* from Turks and Syrians to Egyptian music. After World War I, the Turkish-derived title of *afandi* and later the Arabic title of *ustad* often replaced the earlier *shaykh*, as secular elements slowly entered into Egyptian music replacing the traditional teaching of *mashayikh*.²⁸⁵ Much of the shift involved the relationship between the musicians and their audiences. In the post-War era, *waslah* began to lose its popularity as a musical genre. While vocalists abandoned the *Sufi* tradition of performance, performers of the late 1920s lacked formal connections with that tradition. As a result, short nationalistic songs and musical plays became the most widely accepted forms of mass entertainment. By using Westernized instruments such as violin, cello, and double bass, the male *takht* ensemble was transformed into a Westernized

²⁸³ . Mitchell, A., *Women of Egypt, 1924, 1931*, 15-6.

²⁸⁴ . Ibid., 13; *al-Kiwakib* 17 (July 1932): 4-5.

²⁸⁵ . These were young middle class men who received secular education and wore secular European clothes.

model by the turn of the century. Racy also reports that according to al-Khulai “the two-stringed *al-kamajah al-arabiyya* (the Arabic fiddle) was replaced by *al-kamanjah al-ifranjiyya* (the European fiddle).”²⁸⁶

After 1920s, *takht* was completely transformed into *firqa* ensemble, which basically meant an increase in the number of instrumentalists and the use of the symphony orchestra.²⁸⁷ As the result, the figure of male solo vocalist as the leader of the ensemble was de-emphasized. As a continuation of earlier genres of musical theatre, during World War I, a popular type of theatre in which “comic dialogues and skits with song, music, and dance,” influenced both by European burlesque and Egyptian farces were performed by “prominent actors and troupe leaders such as ‘Aziz ‘Id, and Najib al-Rihani (1881-1949).”²⁸⁸ The impact of Egyptian musical theatre on post-1920s musical change was instrumental. The musical theatre stage mainly diverted the attention of the audience away from musical concerts to the skills of many play writers such as Najib al-Rihani, poets such as Ahmed Shawqi (1868-1932), and composers such as Sayyid Darwish (1892-1923). Egyptian poet and playwright Ahmed Shawqi pioneered the modern Egyptian literary movement, most notably introducing the genre of poetic epics to the Arabic literary tradition. He was raised in a wealthy family of mixed Turkish, Circassian, Kurdish, and Greek origin. He had ties with the Khedivial house and was supported by both Khedive Tawfiq Pasha and Abbas Hilmi II. His early education was at a *Kutub* but he later traveled to France and England for his studies. Upon his return he wrote poems in honor of Khedive Hilmi. His poem was also read at the 1894 International Congress of Orientalists in

²⁸⁶ . Racy, “Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932,” 48-52.

²⁸⁷ . Castelo-Branco, “Performance of Arab Music in Twentieth-Century Egypt,” 559.

²⁸⁸ . Racy, “Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932,” 66.

Geneva. He detested Egypt's occupation by the British and was not in favor of the abolition of the sultanate and the deposition of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid in 1909 at the hands of Kemal Ataturk. In 1914, after 'Abbas was deposed, Shawqi went to exile in Barcelona. Upon his return to Egypt in 1919, Shawqi gained extensive popularity among people and was given the title of *Amir al-Shu'ara* (Prince of Poets). He was elected to the senate in 1923. Although he was criticized for his attachments to 'Abdin Palace, for which he was called "Poet of Arab Princes," he is considered a pioneer in writing neoclassical Arabic poetry. He also wrote "verse dramas."²⁸⁹

Sayyid Darwish came from a humble origin. At the time of Hijazi, patriotic songs were mainly devoted to the glory of the ruling class. Darwish felt a connection with the people and tied that connection to music as the expression of nationalism. Born in Alexandria, Darwish was considered the father of Egyptian popular music, and among Egypt's greatest musicians and the single composer. Initiated by Darwish, musical theatre and performance found a special place in the hearts of Egyptian populations. This form of performance incorporated acting and singing on the stage, which reflected the power of language and voice during the time when the microphone was not used yet. "It seems that training the voice from an early age has a very great influence in giving one a chance of acting or singing as a career...The equivalent in Egypt for voice training at an early age was reciting the Quran." Egyptians sang Darwish's famous nationalist melody *biladi, biladi, biladi* (my country, my country, my country) in 1923, when Egyptian nationalist leader Sa'd Zaghloul returned from exile. The words of this song were adapted from a famous speech by Mustafa Kamil, the leader of the *watani* (nationalist) party. It became

²⁸⁹ . Goldschmidt, Jr., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*, 193.

Egypt's national anthem in 1979. Darwish died on the same day that Sa'd Zaghloul returned to Egypt from exile.²⁹⁰

As shown with the cases of Shawqi and Darwish, one major shift in the post-1920s was a division of labor between the composer and the performer. It produced preset and fixed musical formats by the composer, which in turn limited the improvisatory nature of traditional musical concerts performed by the vocalist. Unlike the nineteenth century's tradition of *mashayikh* in *taswir al-ma'na* (depiction of the meaning of the text by embellishing the sound), musical theatre in general became *musiqat taswiriyyah* (descriptive music) relying heavily on the text instead of traditional spoken dialogues. As a result, the performer lost his earlier ability, as the solo vocalist, composer, and the conveyor of the sound of the language of the *Quran*, to become the contact point both for the masses and the aristocracy to create a sense of imagined identity. While the appearance of musical theatre in Cairo brought the disappearance of the male repertoire of *waslah* and Westernization of the male *takht* ensemble, light *taqtuqa*, which was a female-oriented vocal genre of the nineteenth century *'awalim*, continued to become "widely accepted tools of mass entertainment" in public night clubs and on phonograph discs during 1920s by both male and female performers.²⁹¹ Female artists held popular concerts. By the mid 1920s, because of their high earnings – some of them more than men – they created rivalry among recording companies such as Odeon, Gramophone, and Baidaphon for exclusive contracts with these celebrities, who often manipulated fees and played these companies against each other.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ . Murshid, "The Modern Theatre in Egypt with Special Reference to Melodrama, (1789-1956)."

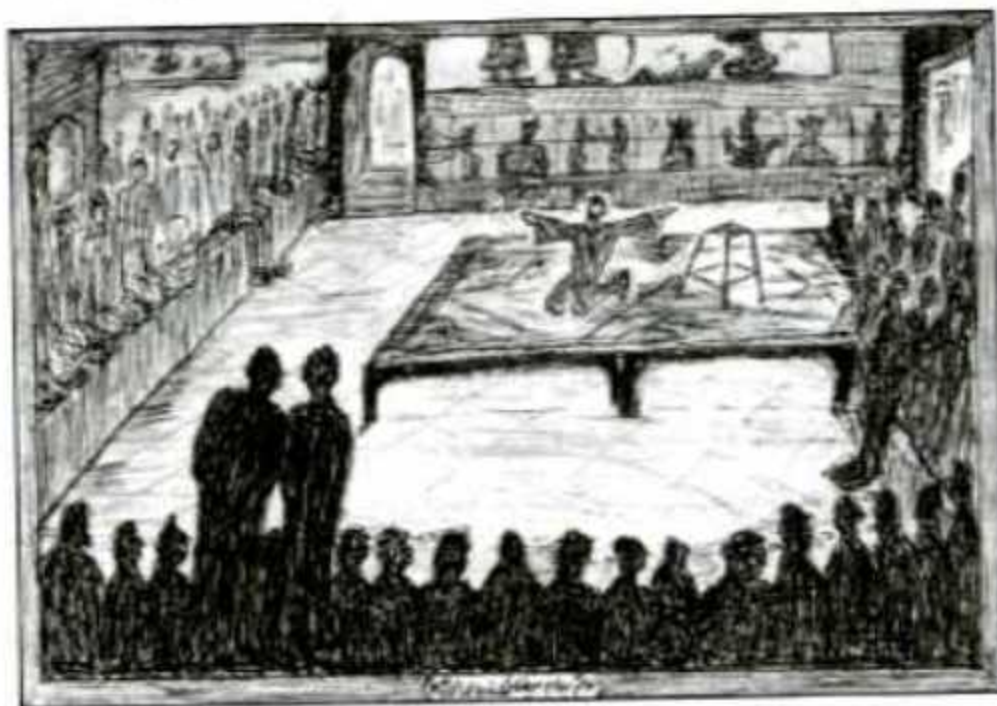
²⁹¹ . Racy, "Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932," 61.

²⁹² . Mitchell, A., *Women of Egypt, 1924-1931*.

Female concerts during the 1920s, which were performed inside theatre-halls and nightclubs, also “continued to have a main vocalist and a handful of female vocal and instrumental accompanists” in the late nineteenth century tradition of male *takht* ensemble and early nineteenth century specialty of *‘awalim*. Fathiyya Ahmed, who appeared in the 1920s in *takht* ensemble as the solo vocalist with her male instrumentalist troupe, continued her performances until the 1940s. The artistic rise of female performers of the 1920s and the popularity of their repertoires, in fact, was a replay of the nineteenth century’s elevation of the figure of the artist in *takht* ensemble, who performed Arabic songs combining classical and colloquial Arabic comprehensible to the Egyptian masses. Post-World War I female performers who performed *taqtuqa*, however, were drastically different in their appearances from the nineteenth century *‘awalim*, as they performed on the public stages of nightclubs, theatre- and concert-halls, as well as in private concerts with male accompanists performing for mixed audiences. An admission fee for the ticket was required and the guild master and court patronage was replaced by the nightclub or theatre manager, the radio station, or the record company as the mediator.²⁹³ As stage artists, female performers of the 1920s embodied stylistic and socio-political developments of a “modernity” in performance, that revived in peoples’ memories a tradition which resembled and identified with Egypt’s “authentic” culture (*al-asala*).

²⁹³ . Racy, “Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932,” 50.

نقّالی در یک قهوه‌خانه. قهوه‌خانه‌ها (نمایشخانه‌های نقّالی) از عهد صفویه تا اواخر قاجاریه از نظر ظاهر و رونق کار تفاوت چندانی نکرد.



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[طرح از نویسنده]

Figure 9: *Naqqali* performed in a coffeehouse from the time of Safavids to the Qajar did not change in appearance and popularity. Drawing by Bahram Beyzai' (Beyzai' Bahram, *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*: 71).



(شماره ۱۵۶) دسته ای از رقاصان

Figure 10: A Group of Female Dancers from Late *Qajar* Period (1910s) (Khaleqi, Ruhalla. *Sargozasht-e Musiqi-e Iran (The Story of the Music of Iran)*, vol.1: 476).



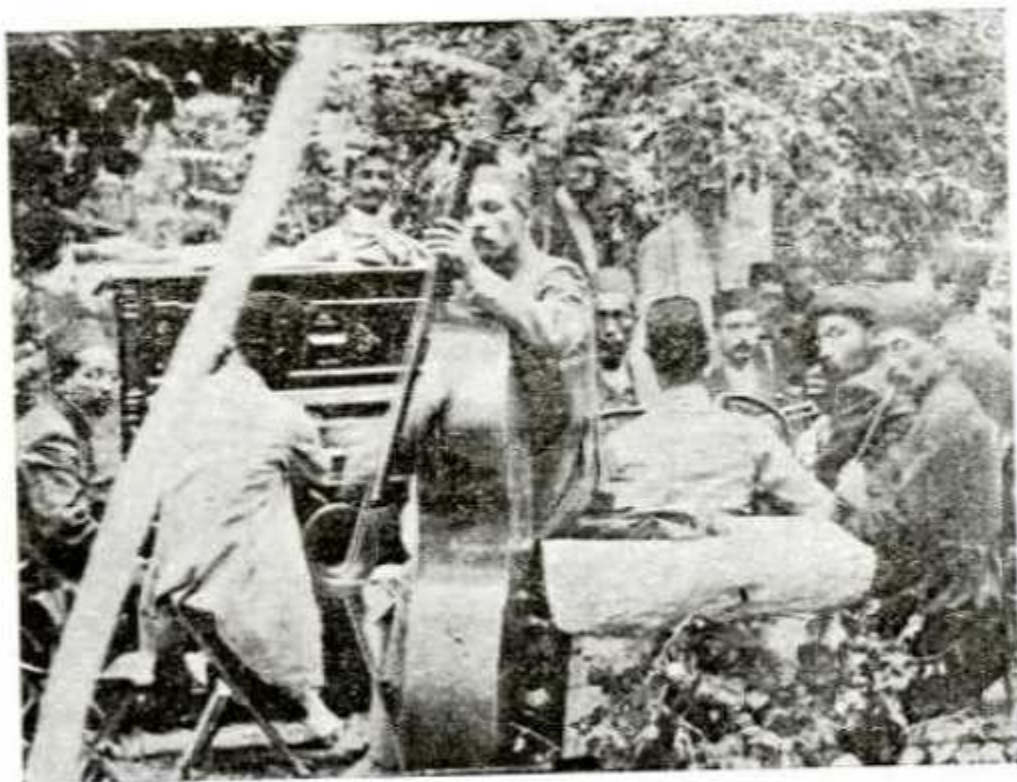
(شماره ۱۵۳) بگدسته از مطربهای تهران

Figure 11: A Group of *Mutreb* (Entertainers) of Tehran (Khaleqi, Ruhallah, *Sargozasht-e Musiqi-e Iran (The Story of the Music of Iran)*, vol. 1: 472).



مرد خوابیده‌ی چپ غلامحسین ملت،
 خوابیده‌ی دیگر و بچه‌ها هیچ - نشسته‌ها از
 راست؛ ذبیح الله ماهری، مهدی مصری، پری
 گلوندگی.

Figure 12: A Group of *Taqlid* (Mimicry) Artists, 1910s and 20s (Beyzai' Bahram, *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*: 182).



(شماره ۲۲) گوشه ای از کنسرت انجمن اخوت (۱۵ رجب ۱۳۳۱ هـ. ق)

Figure 13: A Concert Scene from the *Okhovat* Association, 1910s (Khaleqi, Ruhallah, *Sargozasht- e Musiqi-e Iran (The Story of the Music of Iran)*, vol. 1: 88).



Figure 14: Fathiyya Ahmad, the Number One Artist of Egypt Today (*Ruz al-Yusuf* 189 (September 28, 1930/31): 19).

روز اليوسف في يوم الخميس ٩ يولييه سنة ١٩٢٧

١١

كيف انتقلت من الهدية الى المسرح

السيدة منيرة المهدية

يلايس ردايس في رواية نايمة وهو في دور - طنه

في تاريخ المسرح المصري صحائف لم تنشر بعد ، ويغنى عليها من الضياع . ولا زال حتى الساعة نفاى الكثير في استقصاء أخبار السلف من كبار الفنانين والممثلين وغيرهم عن وضو أول حجر في أساس النهضة الفنية المصرية الشاملة للموسيقى والتمثيل وغيرها من الفنون الجميلة . ولقد ألحنا في مقالنا عن « الزوعدده المحلى » الى العمودية التي يبايها الكاتب المؤرخ إذا أراد أن يذكر الحقائق الأولى وكيف سارت وتطورت ، وأي الظروف أحاطت بها كونتها ورسمت لها طريقها . الخ الخ هذا جزء مهم من « تاريخنا الفني » نغنى أن نقول أنه قد فقد أن الأبد ١١ من أجل هذا ، ومن أجل أن لا يوجه إلينا الخلف النهضة التي نوجهها نحن الى السلف ، وهي نهضة الامل في تسجيل الحوادث المهمة التي تربط حلقات النهضة الفنية وتطورها . . . من أجل هذا ، نحرص كل الحرص على أن نسجل اليوم أولا بأول حوادث الحاضر والماضي القريب والأسباب والنتائج ومقدار أثرها هل هناك كثيرون يعرفون مثلا كيف ولماذا وفي أي الظروف ، نزلت السيدة منيرة

لولا حادثان ، خرجا بها عن طريقها وفتحنا لها سبيلها الجديد الذي لا يزال تسير فيه

بقدم ثالثة حتى اليوم .

الحادث الأول : أمرت السلطنة العسكرية باقتل قهوه زهرة الدتوس كما أفلتت سواها من محال الغناء والرقص والطرب في شارع وجه الحركة وحي الأريكة على العموم . وهكذا اضطرت السيدة منيرة الى ملازمة دارها والبقاء بلا عمل اللهم الا في الليالي التي كانت تدعى فيها للفناء في الافراح .

الحادث الثاني : كان في ذلك الوقت ،

أى في عام ١٩١٦ ، قد تكونت فرقة المرحوم الشيخ سلامة حجازي والاساذ جورج أبيض تحت اسم فرقة دو فرقة أبيض وحجازي . . . وكان من أركانها الاساذ عزيز عيد . وحدث ما أوجب خروج عزيز عيد من الفرقة ، وخرج منها ساخطا حاضا يفكر في طريقة ينتقم بها لنفسه من الشيخ سلامة وجورج أبيض !

أعمل عزيز فكرة ثم اهتدى . . .

فرقة تمثيلية غنائية يصارح بمحطتها بها فرقة دو أبيض وحجازي ، ، يكون عمادها مطربة مصر منيرة المهدية !!

وأسرع عزيز عيد في الحال يعرض للفكرة

Figure 15: Munira al-Mahdiyya Photographed in her Theatrical Role of the Play 'Ai'da (The Benefit) written by Salama Hijazi (*Ruz al-Yusuf* (June 1927): 11).



Figure 16: An Egyptian Play Based on the Ancient Pharaonic Stories, September 1941 (Nishat, Futuh, *Khamsun 'Amma fi Khidama al-Masrah (Fifty Years in the Service of Theatre)*: 175).

Chapter Four

***Zane-Emrouzi/al-Mara' al-Jidida* (The “New Woman”) of the Interwar Period:**

Performance, Identity, and the Performative Act

of Everyday Life in Iran and Egypt

Introductory Piece

As mentioned earlier, performance art presented a trajectory between ideological debates concerning modernity, gender, national identity, and regional history and the binary discourse of authenticity and contemporaneity, tradition and modernity, and ideologies of resistance to/adaptation of Western aesthetics. This trajectory both reflected in and was a reflection of the questions of the public emergence of women in performance arts, the impact of commercial culture of recording companies, radio, and film on art, and the appearance of an artistic life formed by the newly growing urban middle class. Performance art of the interwar period embodied the emerging concept of *zan-e emrouzi/al-mara' al-jidida* (the New Woman) which was both debated within the society and staged inside theatre- and concert-halls. On the discursive level, the emergence of the “New Woman” in the 1920s performing arts engaged the question of *asl/al-asala* (cultural roots) referring to both stylistic and social characteristics of performance arts at a time when debates about *tajaddod/al-jidida* (modernity) seemed to be questioning the meaning of “tradition” and “cultural roots” both within performance art and in socio-political spheres. On the practical level, the “New Women” in performance art placed and was taken by women performers as a unique visible artistic and professional path different from their behind-the-scene work in the nineteenth century. The figure of these female artists as the epitome of a cultural crisis dealing with issues of reinvention, continuity and change, and social and cultural identity gained particular meaning and importance.

Women's entrance as public figures into the public sphere of performance represented a claim to a new form of femininity, both in the field of performance art and in the domain of cultural production, as visible, transcendent, and fluid. The image embodied the act of performing both as an artist and as a female individual in a society whose cultural crisis has placed it in desperate need of political as well as cultural leaders to provide its masses with a prosperous vision of national culture, identity, politics, and national production in the coming years. According to Farfan, public discourse on gender embodies performance not only pertaining to performing arts but also to the performative act of the practice of everyday life. The relationship between performing arts and gender depends on the political, economic, and social contexts of each society. At the same time, performing arts play a significant role in defining national and cultural identities.²⁹⁴ "One cannot underestimate the power of performance, the substantial risks undertaken by performers, and the dynamic relationship between theatre, identity, politics, and society."²⁹⁵

Like a number of female performers of the 1920s, Qamar al-Moluk Aaziri and Munira al-Mahdiyya translated the concept of *tajaddod/al-jidida* (the modern) in performance art within such a framework as they incorporated the trajectory between the stylistic elements and the society's culture within their arts. They both articulated a definition of the performer as a storyteller who had the power to connect with the public by telling them stories about struggles of the peasants, nationalists, and women against the injustices of the aristocracy, ruling class, and a male-dominated culture. Meanwhile they had to keep general audiences entertained by using satire and improvisation. Most important of all, they had to showcase their skill by mastering

²⁹⁴ . Farfan, *Women, Modernism, and Performance*.

²⁹⁵ . Lengel and Warren, eds., *CASTING Gender*, 2.

many aspects of one of the most significant elements of their peoples' traditional popular form of performance, the music. For each of these artists, the meaning of *tajaddod/al-jidida* (modernity) was embedded in having the opportunity to accomplish all of those performative acts in one body, a feminine body, targeted for attacks many times and from many directions, political, religious, and moralistic. As Roberts has argued about women artists and performers of the turn of the century in France, "to act" for a woman "was a form of prostitution aimed at seducing the entire audience. Actresses threatened the naturalized female virtue vital to the notion of sexual difference, but actresses were idols to new women as well as outcasts." Moreover, "By entering the world of the stage actresses lost respectability but escaped the strictures of domestic life."²⁹⁶ Whereas Qamar faced this challenge within the structure of a newly established modern state, Munira experienced it under a relatively loose form of national government, which was mainly preoccupied with the economic and cultural interventions of a foreign colonial power, Britain.

A Voice, a Time, and a Place: Private Qamar and Public Munira

Cultural flourishing surrounding the discourse of the "New Woman" of the interwar period in Iran and Egypt is best illustrated through the extraordinary vocal stands and performative acts of two women singers (and performers), the Iranian Qamar al-Molouk Vaziri and the Egyptian Munira al-Mahdiyya, who played significant roles in giving a humanist, visible, and nationalist identity to women, music, and culture in their societies. Both were born in environments where singing and performing were economic necessities for women and they drew their early inspiration from that.

Qamar al-Molouk Vaziri

²⁹⁶ . Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, 54-7.

After the death of her mother, Qamar al-Molouk Vaziri lived with her grandmother, Mulla Khair al-Nessa', who was a *Rozehkhan* (religious reciter) at Nasir al-Din Shah's *haram* and a *muwalidi* chanter. Qamar was so impressed by the strength of her grandmother's voice that she began imitating her when she was alone. Mulla Khair al-Nessa' discovered this talent in her granddaughter and trained her in her skill and let her perform a duet with her on occasion. During some of these recitations, Qamar would rise and perform short theatrical skits in order to attract the audience's attention. This early informal training solidified her talent and interest in singing. It has been said that from this early exposure Qamar obtained the self-confidence and internal strength vital for a young woman to appear and perform in public. Upon her request her grandmother hired a teacher for her, but he soon died. Her first exposure to the intellectual world of Iranian traditional music occurred when her grandmother took a trip, leaving Qamar in the house of her cousin, the wife of Majd al-Sanaye', a wealthy man whose house was often frequented by many celebrities of the time. By listening to the songs and lyrics performed during these friendly gatherings, Qamar was informally introduced to different systems and methods of Iranian traditional music and developed a special interest in them.

At the tender age of 17, while attending a wedding party with her grandmother, Qamar dared to sing a song which contained rich lyrics from Persian classical poetry, displaying her talent and self-confidence for the first time in public. She became the shining star of the wedding ceremony. It was on this occasion that Ustad Morteza Naydawood, who was a well-known musician, encouraged Qamar to pursue advanced musical education. A few days later, Qamar appeared at the doorstep of Ustad's music school, located on 'Ala' al-Dowleh street, ready to take those special lessons in vocal music. Collaboration between the two reached the point where Naydawood became Qamar's artistic consultant, appearing in many concerts as her

accompanist. She performed her first live concert with her accompanist Naydawood in the newly inaugurated Grand Hotel in Laleh Zar Street in 1924. This was the first time that a woman had appeared on the stage unveiled, singing for a mixed female and male audience.²⁹⁷

In 1931, during her trip to Hamadan, she met 'Aref Qazvini, the famous *tasnif saz* of the time who was living in exile. 'Aref was so impressed by Qamar's artistic and humanist visions that he asked her to sing a couple of his *tasnifha*, *Geryeh Kon* (Cry) and *Marsh-e Jomhuri* (the Republic March).²⁹⁸ Later Qamar formed a small musical troupe with Amir Jahed, another well-known poet, and agreed to sing his nationalistic poems. Meanwhile, she was invited by the chief of the police force, who had good taste in art, to hold a concert in Tehran. It was in this concert that Qamar sang *Morq-e Sahar* (the Twilight Bird), the famous *tasnif* by Malak al-Shoa'ray-e Bahar, accompanied by Naydawood.²⁹⁹ After this performance, Qamar gained an incredible fame and celebrity not only for her delightful voice but also because of her sensitivity towards marginalized people, her love for the poor, and her modest and rich spirit. She became an image of humanity, enhanced by her particular artistic talent, which lived for decades in peoples' memories.

In the years up to and after her establishment as a female artist, the struggle against prejudices and discriminations for Qamar was multi-dimensional, dealing with her husband's demands, with a professional field historically dominated by men, and with her gendered

²⁹⁷ . Pouran Farrokhzad, *Karnamay-e Zanan-e Karay-e Iran: Az Dirooz ta Emrooz (Prospective of Influential Women in Iran: From Yesterday to Today)* (Tehran: Nashr-e Qatreh, 2002); Khaleqi, *Awaye Mehrbani (the Voice of Kindness)*.

²⁹⁸ . *Marsh-e Jomhuri* was written on the occasion of an uprising led by a member of Reza Shah's cabinet Seyyed Zia al-Din Tabatabai in favor of forming the republic government of Iran. I would like to acknowledge Mr. Mohammad Hossein Khosrowpanah who addressed this point and information about another song by Qamar, *Morq-e Sahar (The Twilight Bird)* to me, providing me with audio/visual primary source materials on Qamar.

²⁹⁹ . *Morq-e Sahar* was considered to promote revolutionary actions among peasants against the repressive system of landownership in Iran.

conscious resistance to powerful authorities. She left her husband early on in pursuit of musical training. She appeared unveiled in her first public concert in the Grand Hotel in Tehran in 1924, despite receiving several threats, and refused to perform in Kermanshah for the governor's private party as a precondition for the public concert she was invited to hold in that city. As an improvisatory claim to her independence, she walked out to the balcony of the hotel and started signing for people on the street. Her class consciousness definitely contributed to her persistence in educating the public about drawing a distinctive line between professional singers and prostitutes. Her newly attained middle class status contributed to establishing strong connections with many Iranian nationalist leaders and artists such as Colonel 'Ali Naqi Vaziri, Ustad Naydawood, Abolhassan Saba, and Seyyed Zia al-Din Tabatabai. Her house had become a gathering place for many intellectuals, politicians, and artists. She performed songs written by the nationalist and revolutionary poets and lyricists, Malak al-Shoa'ray-e Bahar, Mirzadeh 'Eshqi, Pejman Bakhtiyari, Vahid Dastgerdi, and Abolqasim 'Aref. *Marsh-e Jomhuri (The Republic March)* and *Morq-e Sahar (The Twilight Bird)* became popular discs of the time, although Reza Shah Pahlavi banned the circulation of the former in 1928.³⁰⁰

Qamar never used a microphone in her public performances. Her ability to maintain calm despite the complexities involved in elevating her voice in terms of diversity, tone, and extension was unique among female singers of the time. Qamar is associated with the origin of a new vocal tone known as *bam*.³⁰¹ The emergence of commercial recording companies in the

³⁰⁰ . Farrokhzad, *Karnamay-e Zanan-e Karay-e Iran (Prospective of Influential Women in Iran)*; Khaleqi, *Awaye Mehrbani (the Voice of Kindness)*.

³⁰¹ . Mansoureh Shoja', *Seday-e Zanan, Ejazeh Mardan (Women's Voice, Men's Permission)* <http://www.iftribune.com/news.asp?id=5&pass=82> (accessed June 19, 2006); Mansoureh Shoja', *Qamar az Zaban-e Afsaneh Rasai', Bahrameh Moqadam, and Parvin (Qamar Told by Afsaneh Rasaii, Bahrameh Moqadam, and Parvin)* <http://www.iftribune.com/news.asp?id=5&pass=83> (accessed June 19, 2006).

region had “multifaceted effects on bringing change in the stylistic development of the performing arts, defining artists’ popular fame, and securing their financial independence.”³⁰² Qamar was a female pioneer to record songs with pre World War I recording companies in Iran. However, it was during the 1920s, after the fall of the Qajar dynasty, the rise of Reza Shah Pahlavi, and the popularity of the press and play writing, and the spread of nationalistic songs and anthems that her fame increased. Her charming voice attracted recording companies, which poured into Iran to record her songs after a long decade during which production had ceased in the region. She signed contracts with Baidaphon and Poliphone to produce records such as *Ta Javanan-e irani Bejan wa Del Nakoushand* (Until the Iranian Youth Do not Try in Body and Soul), *Ay Naw-e Basher Ta Kay?* (Human Kind, Until When?), and *Dar Melk-e iran in Mahd-e Shiran* (In the Land of Iran, House of the Lions) which increased her fame and projected her name out from the elitist, literary, and artistic worlds into the streets and among the masses. Most of her recorded discs, which were archived in Iran’s Radio Broadcasting Office, were destroyed in a fire. Qamar also held concerts for radio from its initial inauguration in 1940. She also contributed to Iranian cinema by appearing briefly as a singer next to Delkash, the future vocal diva of Iranian music, in the film *Madar* (The Mother) produced by Pars Film in 1952.³⁰³

Qamar integrated the important aspects of her public presence with her private feminine persona as she created a subversive self for herself. She often used the charm of her physical and moral attractions to display her other self in public. People still associate her pioneering contribution to the Iranian music of the 1920s and the 30s with the attractive features of her public presence on the stage, her beautiful blond hair, fashionable clothes, and affectionate

³⁰² . Racy, *Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932*.

³⁰³ . Farrokhzad, *Karnamay-e Zanan-e Karay-e Iran* (Prospective of Influential Women in Iran); Khaleqi, *Awaye Mehrbani* (the Voice of Kindness).

expressions. Although Qamar was invited by Umm Kulthum to perform a public concert in Cairo, she never traveled outside Iran. Even though during the peak of her fame she became very rich, Qamar has constantly been remembered by her peers for her activist works on behalf of the poor, children, and women, either by contributing to numerous charity organizations or through individual assistance. She died in 1959 in extreme poverty living in a small rented room in Tehran.

Munira al-Mahdiyya

Born in 1885 in the village of Mahdiyya, Zakiyya Hassan Mansour, later known as Munira al-Mahdiyya, grew up in a poor crowded household. She was raised by her older sister after the death of her parents at a very young age. In her memoirs, compiled on May 30th 1927, Munira recalled the memories of her first subversive act while growing up in Alexandria:

Every morning, I wore my uniform to attend the school, but before going out of the door, I changed that uniform to a nice dress, which I had previously hidden underneath the steps. I would spend the entire day out in town hanging out but return on time when students were on their way home from school. I would then change my dress, go to the store, and purchase the ink to smear my fingers, face, and uniform to give the impression that I was at school. When I arrived home, my sister would welcome me with blessing and admiration. Later, when she found out about my habit, she changed my school and supervised me very closely.³⁰⁴

In 1905 Muhammad Faraj, an influential Cairene on his visit to Zaqaq, where Munira danced and sang in coffeehouses, discovered the beauty and the power of Munira's voice and offered her the opportunity to move to Cairo and to sing in his café. Munira developed a particular passion for and interest in listening to the voice of the singer al-Lawandiyya, whose influence on her was

³⁰⁴ . Ratiba al-Hifni, *al-Sultana Munira al-Mahdiyya (The Queen Munira al-Mahdiyya)* (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq, 1968), 85.

enormous. She started taking lessons in singing, embellishing her voice with a magical tone, which brought her fame and won everyone's heart in an unprecedented way.³⁰⁵

Stories have it that Kamil al-Khalai', the great artist, heard Munira's voice and offered her work in his café, Nuzhat al-Nufus, located in Birhamas neighborhood, close to Bab al-Shaariyya in Cairo. This was the smallest café in a crowded neighborhood in which great female and male musicians worked. Moreover, as a popular café in the capital city, frequented by many different musicians, it had become a place where works by artists such as Ibrahim al-Qabbani, Suleyman Qardahi, and Salama Hijazi were introduced or recited before musical performances. After the closing down of Nuzhat al-Nufus under order of the British, she joined a theatrical company and to present her singing skill between two acts.³⁰⁶ Munira at this time was a beautiful young woman with intellectual and artistic talents, whose presence in the café attracted huge audiences. Her Bedouin girl look at this time also added to her popularity. It was then that Munira sought success by moving to several other nightclubs such as Alhambra and Eldorado, which increased her fame.³⁰⁷ Munira used her middle class status to dare those who questioned her professional persona performing in coffeehouses and nightclubs. Like Qamar but different in her approach, she used her improvisational skills to rupture the association which existed in people's minds between female performers and the concept of the fallen woman, which for centuries had created obstacles for women to appear on the public stages of theatres, nightclubs, and coffeehouses.

³⁰⁵ . Ibid.

³⁰⁶ . Goldschmidt, Jr., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*, 115.

³⁰⁷ . Al-Hifni, *al-Sultana Munira al-Mahdiyya (The Queen Munira al-Mahdiyya)*; Ahmad 'Abol Khazr Minsi, ed., *Al-Ughani wal Musiqi al-Sharqiyya Beyn al-Qadim wal Jidid (The Songs and the Music of the East between Ancient and Modern)* (Cairo: Dar al-Arab lil Bustani, 1965/66).

Munira joined Salam Hijazi's troupe around 1915, and participated in Hijazi's popular musical theatre. But after winning success and with the death of Hijazi, she was able to found her own theatre company in 1917, the second well-known company after musical theatre celebrity Yusuf Wahbi founded Ramsis. Her company produced many Egyptian plays and adaptations of European dramas. Her renditions of Bizet's *Carmen* and her production of Puccini's *Tosca*, assisted by the singer Abd al-Wahhab, were successful because of her attempt to adapt the music to a more Arab style. Her production of *Anthony and Cleopatra* in 1927, which marked the beginning of Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab's professional fame as an actor, was based on poems composed by Sayyid Darwish.³⁰⁸

Munira's artistic works attracted many artists as well as intellectuals and politicians such as Sa'd Zaghlul and Husayn Rushdi, who also frequented Munira's house. Aristocrats and top businessmen would come to see her performances every night. No company in Egypt enjoyed similar fame and prestige at the time, to the point that even British officials admitted the singular status of Munira al-Mahdiyya's *sala*. *Sulatana al-tarab* (queen of the entertainment) had become the peoples' artist, obtaining an equal place next to the most popular musical artist, Salama Hijazi. In response, Munira took peoples' love to heart, while singing nationalistic songs, which encouraged people to act for the independence of their country. She was so active in this area that she became the subject of a popular slogan, *hawa' al-hurriyya fi masrah Munira al-Mahdiyya* (there is love of freedom in the theatre of Munira al-Mahdiyya).³⁰⁹

Munira's role playing skits as a man, which brought her initial success, gained popularity among women who supported her transgressive act of being among the first Muslim women to

³⁰⁸ . Goldschmidt, Jr., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*.

³⁰⁹ . Danielson, "Artists and Entrepreneurs: Female Singers in Cairo during the 1920s," 292-309.

take off her veil in front of a mixed audience. Although she was criticized, sometimes for this unconventional performance, she demonstrated her mastery in that role.³¹⁰ Munira was a pioneer in the twentieth century's Egyptian vocal genre *taqtuqa*. She gained a regional popularity for herself through signing contracts with a "pan-Middle Eastern-North African enterprise," the *Baidaphone* Recording company, which produced many records of her in *taqtuqa* style. She became the major pre-1914 recording artist of the Company, which was founded by a Lebanese family in Beirut in 1907. In the tradition of the performers of *waslah*, whose performance and musical quality were constantly "dependent upon the *tatyib* (laudatory remarks) of the *sami'ah* (the listening connoisseurs)," Munira was a concert-oriented performer, who was not able to "record a pre-composed song in total in a disc because she improvised and elaborated upon the original composition for too long a time while recording." She often composed her own songs for that reason.³¹¹

A beautiful model, an attractive woman, and a fashionable celebrity on and off the stage, Munira participated once in a contest for pretty legs and won the first prize.³¹² In another contest, among three contestants, the public chose Munira in second place ahead of Umm Kulthum, when they were asked about the most beautiful voice, the best performer, and the most appealing entertainment concert to attend.³¹³ In 1926, she was awarded by the Public Works

³¹⁰ . Mitchell, A. *Women of Egypt, 1924-1931*.

³¹¹ . Racy, "Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932," 148, 158.

³¹² . I would like to acknowledge Ms. Kristina Nelson at the Egyptian Center for Culture and Art (ECCA) for assisting me to make contacts with Mr. Mohamed Hassan Ashour. An independent collector of rare Egyptian early recordings, prints, books, original ads and photos, Mr. Ashour brought to my attention the information about this contest. Mr. Ashour also provided me with additional audio/visual primary source materials on Munira al-Mahdiyya, which I used during my presentations at several conferences.

³¹³ . "Mahzar Binatijat al-Istifta' al-'am hal al-Mutarabat al-Salasa (Public Announcement of the Result of the Popular Contest between Three Entertainers)," *Ruz al-Yusuf* 31 (June 2, 1926): 14.

Ministry as the best singer and in 1934 was part of the inaugurating ceremony for Egyptian state broadcasting company, singing before Kemal Atatürk. She rented Badi'a Masabni's *sala* in 1938 and began a series of performances reading from the *Quran*.³¹⁴ Munira has been described as a keen businesswoman. She managed closely all the financial tasks of her *sala* and troupe, from “negotiating with theatre owners, composers, and singers”, to “planning schedules and meeting payrolls.”³¹⁵ She traveled to a number of countries, including Iran, and performed many public concerts overseas. Munira died in Cairo in 1965 in obscurity and modest wealth.³¹⁶

Qamar, Munira, and *Zane-Emrouzi/al-Mara' al-Jidida* (The “New Woman”)

Artistic, nationalist, and feminist performative acts of Qamar on the stage and of Munira in musical theatre contributed to and were a part of the discursive and social emergence of the “New Woman” in Iran and Egypt. Such a concept operated in interwar societies that were experiencing dramatic changes in political and cultural structures impacted by the introduction of photography, sound recording, advertisement, and street culture with the rise of theatre-halls, *sala*, and nightclubs. Qamar and Munira drew on these interactions to create identities for themselves as the “New Woman.” They both grew up in cultures where oral art, improvisation, and musical lyrics played significant roles in defining music and performance as well as the artist. Both improvised in their nationalistic songs by including their names within the lyrics. By doing so they called upon their own agencies to bring music to the service of the people,

³¹⁴ . Goldschmidt, Jr., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*, 115.

³¹⁵ . Danielson, “Artists and Entrepreneurs: Female Singers in Cairo during the 1920s,” 296.

³¹⁶ . Al-Hifni, *al-Sultana Munira al-Mahdiyya (The Queen Munira al-Mahdiyya)*.

available to the public, and as a source of inspiration for cultural, political, and social advancements.³¹⁷

In displaying a visual presence of her self, Qamar operated within the paradigm of a private sphere, as she gave it a public turn. She was an extremely private individual who sought the medium of music and its public domain of the stage as a vocal venue for expressing her creative and humanist self, shown through her charity works. Munira, on the other hand, longed for a public life and became the signing and performing star of the commercial recording and musical theatre in the region. She appeared in numerous plays, met many celebrities, both in political and artistic worlds, sang songs both for recording companies and for live audiences, and transgressed conventional gender roles on and off the stage. Perhaps no narrative can better express the different shades of the public but at the same time private persona of these two interwar celebrities than historical memories of the two nations where Qamar awakened the stage music of one with her humanist voice as *bolbol Iran* (the nightingale of Iran) and Munira thrived in the musical theatre of the other with her spectacular performance as *sultana al-tarab* (the queen of entertainment).

³¹⁷ . In addition, despite the presence of gendered biases in the field of music of the time, popularity of both *bam* and *taqtuqa* and their association with low-brow genres of art reflect the significant impact that Qamar and Munira had on moving music from the private spaces of royal courts out into streets and public stages accessible to common men and women.



Figure 17: Qamar al-Molouk Vaziri Photographed during Different Phases of her Life (Zohreh Khaleqi, *Awaye Mehrbani (The Sound of Kindness)* <http://www.iftribune.com>).

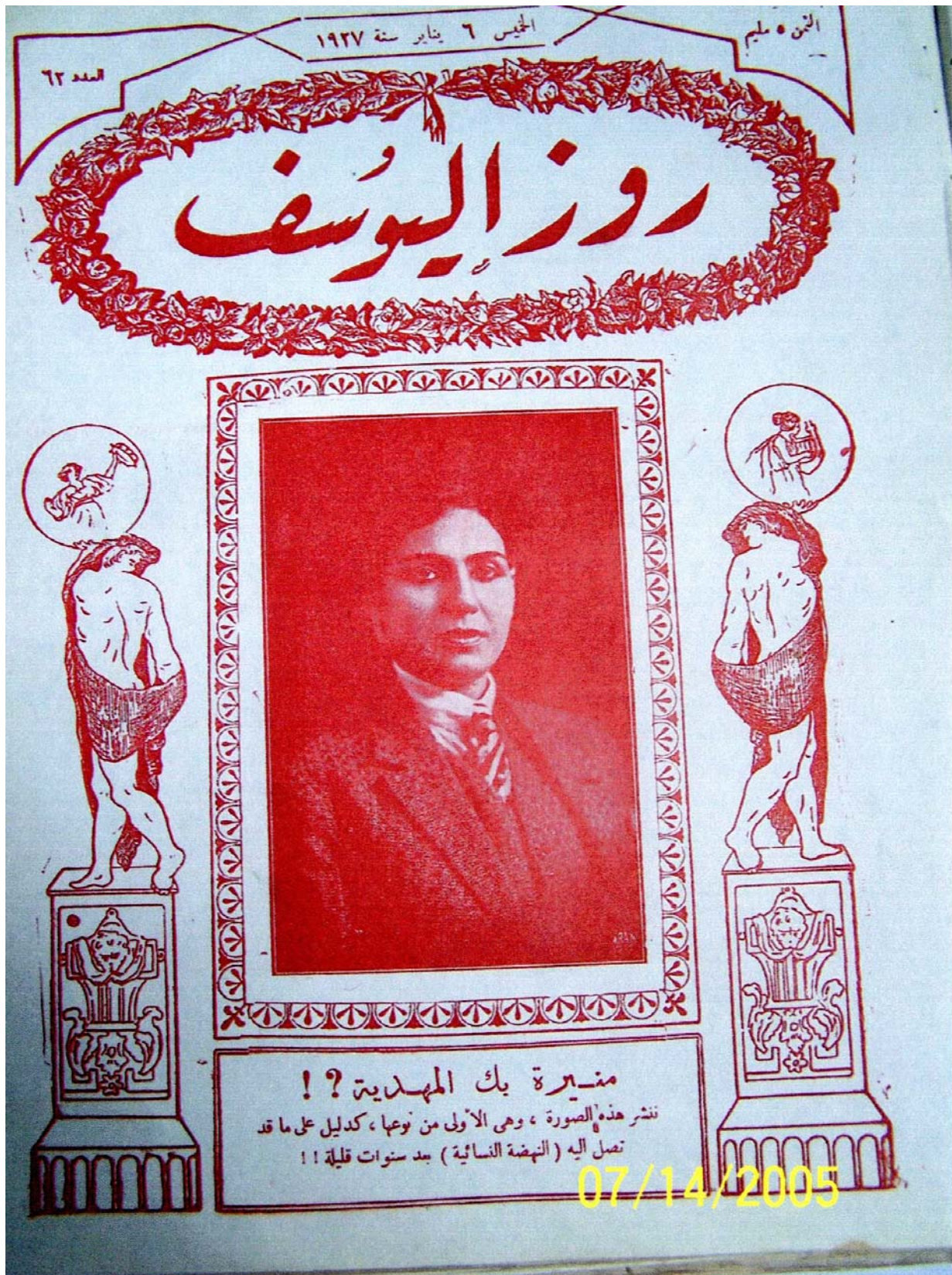


Figure 18: Munira al-Mahdiyya, on the Cover of *Ruz al-Yusuf* 62 (January 1927)

روز اليوسف — العدد ٣٩٨ ٣١

قريباً جداً تشاهدون!
« الغندورة »

بناظرها وملابسها
الشرقية الفخمة



الغندورة

بالحنان — ومقطوعاتها الشجية

* (الغندورة) *
الرواية الاوبرا كوميك
الاولى من نوعها



الغندورة تقوم بتشيها ملكة الطرب والفناء
السيرة منيرة المهرمية
الغندورة : يشترك في تمثيلها نوابغ
الممثلين أمثال : أحمد علام . بشارة واكيم
عبد الحميد زكي . توفيق المردنلي . روحية خالد

قريباً

بسينما ديانا بمصر
وسينما الكوزموجراف بالاسكندرية

07/14/2005

Figure 19: An Advertisement Sheet for the Film *al-Qundura* (The Gigolo) Featuring Munira al-Mahdiyya (*Ruz al-Yusuf* 398 (October 1935): 21).

الافتتاح الجديد
بكاзино البوسفور
بميدان محطة مصر

ادارة السيدة منيرة المهديدية

ابتداء من الاثنين ٢٦ مارس سنة ١٩٣٤ - وكل ليلة - الساعة ٩ ونصف مساء

عادت فتيات ليالى الانس والطرب : اغاني جديدة - ألحان شجية - استعداد حديث - مفاجآت مذهلة

تحت طرب ومغني مستمر
من ملكة الطرب مبدعة فن الغناء

السيدة منيرة المهديدية
الحائزة للدرجة الاولى الممتازة من
الحكومة المصرية والنياشين الفخرية

تترجع علي عرش من اساطين الفن وملوك الطرب في مصر

تغنى فتبدع وتنشد فتطرب جل الله فيما خلق بصوتها الخنون الشجي
صوتها موسيقى ، نغماتها فنية مشجبة ، شهد لها الكل انها فنانة ، قد وهبها الله من حسن الصوت وجلاله ما لم يوهبه لاحد
فاصبحت في مقدمة المطربين والمطربات يتعطف لسماعها ذوو المقامات العالية وغواة فن الطرب
تشجكم بأدوار . وقصائد . وطاقيق غاية في الابداع

تقدم رواية فكاهية من الاستاذ محمد كمال المصري (شرفنطح به) الممثل السينمائي المشهور
كل يوم أحد حفلة نهائية للعموم من الساعة ٦ ونصف مساء « محلات خصوصية للعائلات »

07/13/20

Figure 20: An Advertisement Note about Munira al-Mahdiyya Performing at Casino Al-Busfur (*Ruz al-Yusuf*, 318 (March 1934): 17).

Chapter Five

Localization of a Globalized Product: *Zan-e Emrouzi Shahri/al-Mar'a al-Madani al-Jidida*

(the Urban/Secular “New Women”), the Visual Public Sphere, and Cinema

Introductory Piece

According to many scholars, whereas music and theatre in Egypt and Iran had long and ancient histories, cinema arrived as a creative phenomenon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³¹⁸ A comparative examination of the history of cinema in Egypt and Iran is a means of exploring developments in socio-political history as well as in the aesthetics of performance including theatre and music. Like other performing arts, cinema, both as a physical and an ideological space, contributed to the construction of identity, class, gender, ethnicity, history, culture, religion, national collectiveness, and urban consumerism. However, these structured categories formed through the paradigm of social and experiential interactions among people, have defined cinema as a product of conceptualization of cultural practices of a public life that consisted of music, theatre, press, and later, photography. In that direction, cinema contributed to the emergence and development of a new culture of a visual public sphere in Egypt and Iran during the interwar period, in particular, by giving material and ideological meanings to the concept of *zan-e shahri-e emrouzi/al-mara' al-madani al-jidida* (the secular/urban “New Woman”) through the notion of localization of a globalized cultural and political product. By the word *shahri/madani*, I refer to the ways cinema contributed to the process of institutionalization of culture where women’s entrance to the field of performance art

³¹⁸ . *Asnadi az Musiqi, Teatr, wa Sinema dar Iran (Primary Documents from Music, Theatre, and Cinema in Iran)* 3 vols. (Tehran: Sazman-e Chap wa Entesharat-e Vezarat-e Farhang wa Ershad-e Eslami, 2000); Sadr al-Din Tawfiq, *Qisat al-Sinima fi Misr: Dirasat Naqdiyya (The Story of Cinema in Egypt: A Critical Study)* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1961); Ali Abou Shadi, *Wiq'a'e' al-Sinima al-Misriyya, 1895-2002 (The Accounts of Egyptian Cinema, 1895-2002)*, (Cairo: Al-Hi'at al-Misriyya al-'Ama lil-Kitab, 2004).

as a career was facilitated by the newly emerging state and its intellectual and nationalist representatives and the rise of training schools, advertisements, movie-halls, and a newly structured city life.

In Habermas's terms, cinema as a national communications infrastructure and as a national language, on the one hand continued what the national press and theatre had done a few decades earlier, structurally transforming the citizenry and members of the public.³¹⁹ The rise of the urban "New Woman" in cinema, however, expands Habermas's arguments in multiple directions. Using Srirupa Roy's argument, the rise of the urban "New Woman," on the one hand, was a project of the formation of the public sphere and the discourse of gender as an institutionalized form of citizen identity operating within the process/project of state-building. On the other hand, urban/secular "New woman," viewed within the context of interwar Iran and Egypt points out "the legitimate critique" of Habermas's theory by questioning the inequalities involved within the participatory deeds of the members of the public, such as the exclusion of women.³²⁰ In that direction, the rise of the urban/secular "New Woman," in cinema in particular and in society in general, was also a distinct project of collective identity formation or nation-building, acted and viewed by women themselves. Cinematic apparatus, in turn, extends Habermas's theory of public sphere as textual into an enhanced visual participatory arena.³²¹

Interwar Egyptian and Iranian films used images of women as metaphorical or synecdochic symbols, to present various social institutes. However, the production of such

³¹⁹ . Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

³²⁰ 1. Nancy Fraser, "Special Section: Transnational Public Sphere: Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24 (2007): 7-30.

³²¹ . Alev Cinar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

images was strongly connected to the concept of continuity and change among cinema, theatre, and music, reaching its high moment during the early twentieth century both in content and in form. The presentation as well as the representation of women in cinema was a gradual process in the development of a society and nation-state building. In this process, the spatial development of theatre from street corners and coffeehouses to *tamashakhaneh* (European-style theatre halls) gradually opened a path for women's private performances to be transformed into a public presence. Women's images in cinema served as a space where women's issues mirrored the discourse of nation-state building of a society in the process of socio-political transformations. This was also accompanied by some distancing from the traditional center of power, both in terms of physical and economic space as the nationalist leaders and intelligentsia began to flourish and push aside traditional and foreign tradesmen. The result was formation of new vivid urban centers with shops, entertainment sites, and restaurants.

The emergence of an experiential space by and about the "New Woman" in cinema also shifted the center of discourse from politics to culture by a total replacement of the style of socio-political satire of popular theatres with local adaptations of Western-style theatrical and cinematic genres. This drew exclusively on the elevation of individual and societal morality of the time, since women's presence in public carried a moral weight not a political one. Women's physical presence in public performances of theatre and cinema, on the other hand, granted a space for female spectators to both contest for and imagine their rights as citizens to gaze, contrary to the ideological and discursive manifestation of men's gaze. A comparative look at the history of the emergence of cinema in Egypt and Iran, using a cross-thematic and a cross-historical methodology will articulate this process of identity formation based on local historical processes.

Dhoktar-e Lor (A Daughter from Lor), Urbanism, and the State Nationalism

The second half of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of a period of cultural and social transformations in Iran. Students who were sent by Abbass Mirza to study in Europe returned. Numerous reforms in the areas of politics, the military, education, and labor took place. The government and some clerics encouraged education in the sciences. The emergence of the press and translation of books provided knowledge about the history and cultures of other societies, including Europe.³²² As in Europe, the field of performance influenced and was influenced by these social reforms and began to be transformed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both as a physical and a virtual space, several popular forms of *namayesh* (performance), such as *naqqali*, *ta'zieh* and *taqlid*, in the process of their spatial and temporal developments served the Iranian people as means to create various social interactions. Until early twentieth century men, through their public presence in *namayesh*, were able to generate a major part of these interactions; therefore, whereas the gradual formation of class, ethnicity, religion, and national collectiveness through theatre took shape before the twentieth century, construction of gender as the “New Woman” became specifically an early twentieth century discourse as it advanced towards cinema.

While the importance of theatre as an influential medium for social and cultural awakening and advancement was emphasized by the new middle and upper class nationalists and intelligentsia, the emergence of *tamashakhaneh* (literary the house of spectacle, theatre-halls) as well as the European-style drama and playwriting during the early decades of the twentieth century smoothed the path for articulation of gender in cinema both as discursive and as social definitions of the *shahri/madani* “New Woman.” Cinema and the emergence of the first Iranian

³²² . Sami, “Az Zanpush ta Zan ((From Female Mimicry to Woman), 4-14.

feature films during the 1930s highlighted the ways the discourse of gender operated to address the question of urban expansion and city life versus the decadence of the rural and the process of materialization of a pre-structured and pre-scribed form of Iranian culture shaped by the state and its institutional ideologies within the newly emerged nation-state of Iran.

Cinema marked the high point of connection between the development of popular theatre and the emergence of the public presence of women in performance. The first three silent and talkie films, made during the 1930s, had all male directors but women played significant roles both as subjects and as protagonists. *Haji Aqa Actor Cinema* and *Bolhavas* (Capricious), directed by Ebrahim Moradi, addressed the question of *tahzib-e akhlaq* (moral elevation), by replacing the tradition and virtue with individual determination. *Dokhtar-e Lor: Iran-e Dirouz, Iran-e Emrouz* (A Daughter from Lor: Iran Yesterday, Iran Today), directed by ‘Abdolhossein Sepenta, focused on how the state apparatus was able to pull together the nation of Iran as a modern state, establishing order and security in tribal villages, promoting urban life, and encouraging individual sacrifices for patriotic purposes.

In *Haji Aqa Actor Cinema*, Haji, who is a traditional father with an old-style approach to the question of woman, accepts his daughter’s desire to become a film actress. During a conversation with his daughter and future son-in-law, Haji becomes convinced that he should put aside traditional ideas of virtue in favor of individual self-determination. Haji’s transformation is viewed as a mental cure achieved through his acceptance of and integration into a modern society. This is conveyed by his watching the unveiled dance performance of his daughter two years before the mandatory decree of women’s unveiling issued by the government of Reza Shah Pahlavi. With the rise of Reza Shah as the new ruler of Iran, many reform projects went into operation, such as maintaining law and order in the city and countryside, establishing a new

communication system through building roads, The Trans-Iranian Railway, the introduction of aviation, the modernization of various branches of the civil service and armed forces, reform of the judicial system including enforcing commercial, penal, and civil law codes, and improvement of women's condition through the civil code, such as placing the minimum age of marriage for girls at fifteen. Although the *Majlis* approved laws in 1934 to increase the number of additional teacher training colleges and the building of the University of Tehran, the pace of reform was too fast for Iranian people and in particular women, who still maintained a high percentage of illiteracy and seclusion practices. The project of unveiling began in 1932 through several means such as the unveiled appearance of high-ranking daughters and sisters in some gatherings, encouraging female teachers to appear unveiled in school, and asking female school inspectors to talk to school girls about the benefits of unveiling. The foundation of Kanoon Banovan-e Iran (The Iranian Ladies Center) in 1935 facilitated the process of carrying educational and civil advancement to urban women by providing them education in the area of housekeeping and child rearing on a scientific basis through lectures, publications, and adult classes, to promote sport and maintenance of a healthy body, to encourage the foundation of charitable institutions for mothers and children, and to use nationally made products.³²³

Although unveiling was not discussed during the Center's first gathering it became an essential task throughout the Center's first year of operations. Police had received orders to protect women who began to attend the Center's meetings unveiled, which was a risky task at the time. On January 7, 1936, eight months after the formation of the Center, Reza Shah arranged to appear at the men's Teacher Training College to officially announce the abolition of women's veils in Iran. All women teachers were instructed to attend along with ministers'

³²³ . Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light*, 91-2.

wives. Members of the royal family, his wife and two daughters also appeared in the auditorium. The Shah concluded his speech with the following phrase: “Ladies, know that this is a great day, and use the opportunities which are now yours to help the country advance.” From that day women were forbidden to appear veiled on the streets and police were ordered to stop them if they did. The order also spread to other cities and in a few like Mashhad protest by *‘ulema* created encounters with the police force. Civil servants’ wives were expected to join their husbands in receptions and official celebrations, which made the situation odd because men were able to “meet each other’s wives and daughters for the first time.”³²⁴

Dancing as a form of performance in public was prohibited for women based on the religious and moral standards of the society. Although non-Muslim female *mutreb dawrehgard* (gypsy entertainers) during the Safavids danced in public festivities such as weddings, baby ☐asino, and circumcisions, the *‘ulema* banned these performances after the fall of the Safavids. The Qajar dynasty ultimately restricted dancing by women to their courts for their own private festivities.³²⁵ The emergence of professional schools in the field of performing arts during the first decades of the twentieth century, such as the Advanced School of Theatre in 1930 and The House of Actors, smoothed the path for professional definition of the art of dancing similar to theatre and music. Learning to dance in public, as a profession for women, became acceptable, and the moral standards of the time slowly erased the older view, which considered this form of performance as taboo for women. It is this transformation that *Haj Aqa Actor Cinema* attempts to promote and reveal, with Haji’s daughter representing the moral of a new society and culture.

³²⁴ . Ibid., 92-6.

³²⁵ . Beyzai’, *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*.

Similar to the transformation and development of Iranian popular theatre before the nineteenth century, a line of connection could be drawn between the emergence of cinema in Iran and traditional methods of representation such as magic bowl, *fanus kheyal*, *bazi kheyal*, and *kheyime sayeh gardan*.³²⁶ In that direction, the emergence of cinema during the first decades of the twentieth century is an example of the process of continuity and change in the field of theatre and performance, which also embodied the transformation of peoples' social interactions. Photography, a nineteenth century innovation, for example, had primary ties with cinema. In *Haji Aqa Actor Cinema*, Haji Aqa asks Parvin what she would wish to have. Haji Aqa's daughter presents a photograph of the American actress Annie Andorra to her father and replies she would like to become a film actress. Photography, a source of material culture with a social correlation, was the first technical medium before cinema. It illuminated the futuristic aspects of identity formation at a time when the nation was faced with internal turmoil and subject to external cultural and political interventions.

Mirza Ebrahim Khan Akkas Bashi, who later accompanied Mozafar al-Din Shah on his trip to Europe, was the first photographer in the service of the Qajar court. He had learned this art at the school *Dar al-Funun*.³²⁷ However, many historians believe that Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar was the first Iranian photographer, familiar with the scientific and technical methods of this art. He had purchased many cameras during his trips to Europe. Turning photography, similar to *ta'zieh*, into entertainment, Nasir al-Din Shah used his camera to take numerous

³²⁶ . These are several forms of pre-nineteenth century popular performances, which involved playing dolls or puppets in front of light. The images seen by the audience were shadows reflected on the wall or tent.

³²⁷ . Dar al-Funun (The House of Arts/Sciences) was the first institution of higher education founded by Nasir al-Din Shah in 1851. It was the only state-sponsored school with European staff and instructions in European languages and curriculum. See Fatemeh Qazih *Rooznameh Khaterat-e Nasir al-Din Shah dar Safar-e Awal Farangestan (The Journal of Nasir al-Din's First Trip to the West)* (Tehran: Sazman-e Asnad Melli-e Iran, 1998).

photographs of women who lived inside his harem. Women who posed for Nasir al-Din Shah have often been seen wearing various adaptations of European ballet outfits, upon the Shah's suggestion after his return from Europe. Shah's camera was the first medium to contribute to the process of publicly and visually registering differences in women's identity formation, where distinctions could be made between a concubine servant and a legitimate wife as well as their ethnic differences as Caucasians, Arabs, Turks, and Kurds. This was conveyed through dress, makeup, sitting or standing poses, furniture, and objects displayed in the room. Similar to the later appearance of *tamashakhaneh* and the public emergence of non-Muslim, Jewish, Armenian, and Zoroastrian women performers, the Shah's photographs from the private sphere of his harem contributed to the initial process of making public and visual the distinctions which were constructed between women both in terms of religion as well as ethnicity. Cinema expanded such distinctions by creating further categories.

In *Dokhtar-e Lor*, Golnar, who was born in a respected city family, is captured by a group of bandits and forced to work in a roadside coffeehouse as a dancer and singer. Ja'far is a government inspector who has been given the mission to find and capture the bandits. When Ja'far stops at the coffeehouse for a break he sees Golnar and falls in love with her. Golnar is at first suspicious but later discovers that he has good intentions. After a series of adventurous events, Ja'far and Golnar escape from the hands of the bandits, killing their chief. They travel to India to build their life together. In India the news about socio-economic advancements in Iran inspires them to go back. They leave India after a visit to Bombay's Imperial Film Studio, in which they are introduced to the most advanced technical equipment in cinematography.³²⁸

³²⁸ . Jamal Omid, *Abdolhossein Sepenta: Zendegi wa Sinema (Abdolhossein Sepent: Life and Cinema)* (Tehran: Sherkat-e Tehran Fariyab, 1984).

In a scene from *Dokhtar-e Lor*, the owner of the coffeehouse, Ramazan, promises a sheikh in the coffeehouse to let him enter Golnar's room at night in exchange for money. Ja'far, who has overheard the conversation between the sheikh and Ramazan, intervenes and ultimately saves Golnar from the abusive hands of the Sheikh. Sepenta had studied the history and culture of ancient Iran and knew by heart the popular epic story *Shah-nameh* by the great Iranian poet Ferdowsi. In *Dokhtar-e Lor*, Sepenta makes a connection between the story of the *Shahnameh* and the question of woman, by reiterating the subject of oppression and justice, the former in regard to a nation and the latter towards women, a marginalized group. Sepenta's choice of the location, the coffeehouse, where Golnar becomes a subject of abuse at the hands of men and then is protected by Ja'far, on the one hand, is a deliberate reference to a significant popular place, with strong resonance in a nation's public memory of the struggle for justice and independence. On the other hand, reference to the coffeehouse, as an exclusively male domain with behind the scene agreements, is a criticism of the total exclusion of women from the public performance of the art of storytelling in the coffeehouses.

Whereas women, through oral tradition, had played important roles in keeping alive the art of storytelling, female performers of *ta'zieh* and *taqlid* were only allowed to participate in women's private gatherings and festivities. Female artists, when allowed to perform in public, were only expected to perform popular dances, which usually gained them bad reputations in the way Golnar was represented in the movie. By making a reference to Golnar's oppression, Sepenta in fact attempts to change men's attitude and behavior toward women. Exclusion of women from this form of public performance is a relevant context for Sepenta's allusion to the manly world of the coffeehouse. On a broader level, however, Golnar, caught between the forces of good and evil and uncertain about Ja'far's intentions, was constructed as an allegory

and a metaphorical reference to the nation and the country of Iran, struggling to advance and obtain national independence from foreign encroachment, looking at its ancient history but at the same time accepting certain aspects of European *tajaddod* (modernity).

While a major part of the story in *Dokhtar-e Lor* appears to be taking place in a village in Iran, the film makes several references to the city of Tehran. Ja'far attempts to convince Golnar to leave the village and move with him to the city. Ja'far is also dressed in a modern style outfit wearing a *Pahlavi* hat, which was fashioned in Iran after Reza Shah's visit to Turkey. Reza Shah was inspired by the modernist reforms of Kamal Attaturk in the cultural infrastructure, including dress and outfits. Throughout the film, Golnar appears entirely in her village-style outfit. Transformation of Golnar from a rural girl into an urban, middle to upper-class woman occurs only in the last shot, through the symbol of her Western-style dress and playing of the piano. In response to Ja'far's question of whether she will move with him to Tehran, Golnar states: "Tehran is a beautiful city but its people are bad." Many multi-directional references to the city and urban architecture occur in *Dokhtar-e Lor*, such as the prescribed urban outfits versus loose rural dress, the closed private urban interior versus the open fields of the countryside, and the ship versus the horse as the medium of transport. Parallel to such emphasis in the film on spatial transformation of the village to the city, a shift in physical sites of *namayesh* took place at the beginning of the twentieth century, sustaining the introduction of gender and the question of woman in the public sphere of both performance art and performativity. This was a time of the formation of a new urban geography of city space produced through continuing negotiations between different groups of people. The city space assumed infra-structural transformations as different groups of people interacted politically, socially, and economically. Spatial division of the city based on class, ethnicity, religion, and

gender therefore “created a new set of relations and places,” which paradoxically both encouraged women to and banned them from laying claim to “a domain – the public space – in which their legitimacy as actresses even today finds [ambiguous] resistance.”³²⁹

The new presentational forms in the city as well as the representational displays in film in turn had wider impacts, placing boundaries on people’s experiences of *namayesh* formed through a process of social interaction. The first signs of the urbanization of performance appeared in *ta’zieh*. It was during the time of Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar that *ta’zieh*, performed in permanent sites called *tekieh* or *hosseinieh*, played a significant role in elevating the class status of government authorities. *Tekieh Dawlat*, built in 1869 by the order of the Shah, who was inspired by buildings he had seen in Europe, was originally planned to be a *tamashakhaneh* (theatre-hall), an idea strongly opposed by ‘ulema. *Tekieh Dawlat* was the quintessential example of spatial boundaries placed on the art of performance, which transformed the paradigm of peoples’ social interactions. The original location of *ta’zieh* inside coffeehouses and the courtyards of mosques, and at cemeteries had its roots in the long nomadic life and spirit of the past tribal life style of Iran’s diverse tribes and ethnic groups.³³⁰ In contrast to the coffeehouses or street corners, the permanent location of *Tekieh Dawlat* not only destroyed the tight-knit communal bonds between the artist and his audience, which had its roots within the free engagement of *naqqallan* with their audience, but also set a foreground for making visible distinctive boundaries, such as class, ethnicity, and gender, which were created between people through a new set of daily experiences of their interactions at the performance site.

³²⁹ . Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

³³⁰ . Gharibpour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)*.

For example, *ta'zieh* performed inside *Tekieh Dawlat* used the most sophisticated and expensive type of materials from silk fabrics, gold, and crystals for decoration. The carriage pulled by eight horses sent by Napoleon to Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar as a gift was brought to *Tekieh Dawlat* and used by performers. Members of the upper class competed with each other in financial support of *ta'zieh* inside *Tekieh Dawlat*. They also organized smaller *ta'zieh* in their palaces and courts.³³¹ Such spatial transformation was a way for the government to strengthen its authority and control over ethnically and economically divided people during the religious month of Moharram. Institutionalizing *namayesh* and elevating the luxurious aspect of *ta'zieh*, permanent *tekieha* such as *Tekieh Dawlat* distanced *ta'zieh* from its religious spirit and turned it into a secular and entertaining narrative appropriate for emerging urban centers. Overall, spatial formation of *ta'zieh* institutionalized *namayesh* and placed it in the controlling hands of the government and the aristocracy. This spatial shift was an important contributing element in the production of an urban form of *namayesh* and the introduction of a number of changes, both in subject and in location, of the popular form of *namayesh*.

In *ta'zieh* performed in public, *zan khan* (a young man with a soft voice) played the role of a woman, because women were banned from performing plays in public. A passageway on the first floor of *Tekieh Dawlat* was reserved for female audience and children.³³² It allowed women for the first time to use a segregated public space in a building dedicated to performance. The public presence of women in *Tekieh Dawlat* as a segregated group of audience members was an initial step in contributing to the introduction of gender and the social debates about the question of women on the stages of *namayesh*. Women's *ta'zieh*, such as *ta'zieh Shahrbanoo* or

³³¹ . Beyzai', *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*.

³³² . Ibid.

Arousi-e Dokhtaran-e Qureish (wedding of the daughter of Qureish), were performed inside the private houses of aristocrats, and had gained popularity. Although women aristocrats, such as Hajieh Khanom and Qamar al-Saltaneh, two daughters of Fath ‘Ali Shah Qajar, hosted private female *ta’zieh* in their quarters,³³³ their support elevated urban culture by developing new forms of social interaction between different classes of women. The city space, containing permanent locations of *namayesh*, which developed from *tekieh* into *tamashakhaneh* during the first decades of the twentieth century, obtained particular significance, as women became one of its most important signifiers in the process of urban development as well as the urbanization of *namayesh*. In addition to the appearance of women as performers on the stage of *tamashakhaneh*, the process of urbanization with the establishment of *tamashakhaneh* and urbanization of *namayesh* also came through purchasing tickets, which was a new way to segregate aristocrat and female audiences from rest of the people by privileging them special seats in balconies.

Although the original entertaining function of *Tekeieh Dawlat* was diverted to religious performance of *ta’zieh*, the idea of establishing *tamashakhaneh* to please aristocracy did not die. To fulfill Nasir al-Din Shahs’ desire to own a private space for performance, Akbar Khan Naqqash Bashi established a *tamashakhaneh* inside the School of Dar al-Funun, the first advanced science school based on the European model. Meanwhile, the appearance of entertaining *dastehay-e moqqalledan* (the group performers of *taqlid*) in private houses and inside several tea- and garden-houses gained popularity among nationalist elites and intellectuals. Russia’s intervention in the country also acted against the opposition of a group of ‘ulema to the performance of *taqlid* by giving *moqqaledan* a semi-ruined building in Shahpour

³³³ . Ibid.

Street, later named Teatr-e Ali Beg, the first *tamashakhaneh* built during the reign of Ahmad Shah Qajar (1909-1925). Between 1909 and 1916 converting coffeehouses and storehouses into *tamashakhaneh*, which also served for screening films, became popular among people in the cities of Tehran, Tabriz, and Rasht.³³⁴ It was at this time that, along with the emergence of *tamashakhaneha*, major structural urban developments, such as the expansion of streets and electricity, changed the face of the city of Tehran.

In 1911, Syyed Ali Nasr, who had returned from Europe, established Komedi-e Iran (Iran Comedy Company) and Komedi-e Akhavan (Akhavan Comedy Company), initiating Western style theatre and inviting Armenian, Turkish, and Jewish women, such as Sara Yahudi, Molouk Hosseini, and Banu Shekofteh to play for the first time the roles of women on a public stage.³³⁵ Pari Aqa Babayef was one of the most skilled (and courageous) female performers of the time, who despite much opposition succeeded in establishing a performing company which brought several plays on stage at the Grand Hotel of Tehran in 1921. She had studied in Europe and played a significant role in the emergence of the Iranian national theatre in the early twentieth century. She choreographed a musical play and brought it to the stage with the participation of several Armenian women in the northern cities of Rasht and Bandar Anzali. Later, she founded a performing company and named it “Pari” and she herself appeared in many stage plays. One of her plays, *Faje’h Rostam wa Sohrab* (The Drama of Rostam and Sohrab) was appraised highly by critics and earned her national recognition. The phonograph company, *His Master’s Voice*, recorded her songs, which were in the form of European operettas as well as Caucasian

³³⁴ . Ibid.

³³⁵ . Sami’ “Az Zanpush ta Zan ((From Female Mimicry to Woman).

folklore. Pari Aqababayef also contributed to Iranian cinema by founding a small cinema hall under her own name.³³⁶

At this time *taqlid* had almost lost its popularity because of the emergence of new forms of *namayesh* influenced both by the architectural design of the new *tamashakhaneh* as well as through the transformations taking place in the genre. In 1922 Teatr-e Iran-e Javan (the Theatre of Youth Iran) was founded with the collaboration of the individuals who had just come back from Europe. Iran-e Javan was among the first theatre-halls where Muslim men and women for the first time were able to sit next to each other, watching the performance.³³⁷ Several women, such as Shalmani Gol, Molouk Molavi, Pari Galubandakii, Lala Vartoonian, Molouk Zarrabi, and Pari Aqa Babayef appeared for the first time both in *taqlid* and adaptations of foreign dramas in *tamashakhaneha* in 1930. Loretta, an iconic theatrical figure in the adaptations of foreign dramas, first appeared in Teatre Nekisa (Nekisa Theatre) in 1930 together with Niktaj Sabri, Molouk Hosseini, Chehazad and Iran Daftari. In 1934, Tamashakhaneh Iran, built in a poor neighborhood, was among a very few which survived to bring on stage an original performance of *taqlid*, rejecting influences from uptown foreign performances.³³⁸

Under the influence of the European forms of theatre and cinema halls, at the end of World War I several changes appeared inside Tamashakhaneh Ali Beg, including allocating three sides to the viewing audience instead of the previous four, and the use of a *doornama* (a fixed panoramic perspective depicting a scene from city landscape) as the background. The modified design of Tamashakhaneh Ali Beg restricted and limited the much freer relationships

³³⁶ . Farrokhzad, *Karnamay-e Zanan-e Karay-e Iran (Prospective of Influential Women in Iran)*.

³³⁷ . Qaribpour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)*.

³³⁸ . Beyzai' *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*.

between artist and the audience in earlier *taqlid*. Influenced by the new trend of Western drama, which was considered high art by the intelligentsia, *taqlid* began to use prewritten stories.

Tamashakhaneha also initiated a mobile curtain wall on the stage, distribution of leaflets and the institution of certain forms of discipline among the audience inside the hall. While building Western style *tamashakhaneh* gained popularity among intellectuals, the way the masses approached these new phenomena, like the Iranian-style adaptations of the Western plays, was intriguing. Loose chairs, eating nuts, untimely applause, and loud expressions of emotion were some of these characteristics.³³⁹

Urban development, the emergence of new economic and social categories, appearance of *tamashakhaneha*, elimination of direct contact between the artist and the audience on the stage, and women's entrance into *tamashakhaneha* both as audience and as artists opened the path for the arrival of cinema and the establishment of movie- and theatre-halls. While the development of cities and urbanization of *namayesh* decreased interaction both between the artist and the masses and among the audience, cinema promoted the idea that the masses could establish relationships among themselves through film and its framed stage inside the movie- and theatre-halls. In "Immersion Cinema," Tim Recuber has emphasized the technical achievement of the introduction of Cinerama and Cinemascope to the detriment of social or artistic relevance of the film by making the statement that "The clearly delineated segregation of spaces which had characterized previous conditions of ... spectatorship gave way to an illusory integration of spaces in which images and sounds from the 'fictional' space of the motion picture appeared to

³³⁹ . Qaribpour, *Theatr dar Iran (Theatre in Iran)*.

enter the ‘actual’ space of the audience; the audience, thus surrounded by images and sounds, felt itself to be part of the space depicted on the screen.”³⁴⁰

In line with the development of *tamashakhaneh*, the rise of cinema and film screening was the ultimate reflection of the process of urbanization and institutionalization of performance. Russi Khan, who established his photo studio in ‘Ala’ al-Dowleh Street and the Boomer Cinema hall in Laleh Zar Street, played a significant role in shifting the economic heart of the city from its traditional center of power, Bazar, into new European-style neighborhoods with luxurious houses and gardens surrounding Russian and British embassies. The shift occurred at a time when the country was passing through a vital phase of political turmoil. While the Russians were screening imported silent films from the first decades of world cinema inside these luxury gardens and houses, performers of *taqlid* were addressing the stories of injustices in the epic story of *Shahnameh* in a few remaining coffeehouses, the military was shooting revolutionary demonstrators at Shah ‘Abdol-‘Azim’s *tahasson* (refuge), and Cossack brigades were bombing the Majlis (parliament). Despite, and perhaps because of, the materialist interest of Russians and Britons involved in the business of cinema, Iranian intellectuals, nationalists, and clergymen approached the emergence of cinema in Iran not from a technical standpoint but with cautionary debates about cinema’s role in forming the newly discussed fragmented identities. Their discourse promoted the notion of cinema as a medium for raising consciousness and mobilization of the masses against internal injustices and external exploitation.³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ . Tim Recuber, “Immersion Cinema: The Rationalization and Reenchantment of Cinematic Space,” *Space & Culture* 10 (2007): 315-29.

³⁴¹ . Mohammad Tahami Nejad, *Sinemay-e Iran (Iranian Cinema)* (Tehran: Daftar-e Pajouheshay-e Farhangi, 2001).

Urbanization of *namayesh*, which came through the development of the city and its early permanent centers of entertainment, *tamashakhaneh*, moved towards the establishment of several cinema-halls. The emergence of women as public artists and performers, first in *taqlid* and later in film, embodied debates articulating the mission of cinema both as a medium of cultural elevation and as a national financial interest. The first three Iranian feature films during the 1930s marked the emergence of the earlier concept of the “New Woman” in music and theatre. It placed that concept within a new territory, the *shahri/madani* (urban/secular), addressing the question of professional and career rights of Iranian women. Two apparatuses addressed the concept of the *shahri/madani* New Woman, the appearance of the first Iranian women in film as leading actresses and the representation of woman as an allegorical subject of the films’ narratives.

In filming *Dokhtar-e Lor*, Sepenta paid particular attention to the popular mass bases of the actors. Except for Sepenta, who played the role of Ja’far, people selected for the role of the actors and the actress Ruhangiz Sami Nejad were non-professional common people. Viewed within the context of the cultural and political upheavals of the early twentieth century, that notion is particularly significant. The newly emerged middle and upper class nationalists and intelligentsia at the turn of the century, who had returned from Europe inspired by the impact of the Western-style theatre on the social and cultural awakening and advancement of the masses, slowly transformed the genre of *taqlid*, which ultimately disappeared in the late 1930s. The camera brought to Iran by Mozafar al-Din Shah and ‘Akkas Bashi and later purchased by the wealthy progressive Iranian tradesman Mirza Ebrahim Sahhafbashi, was not used to record the mass uprising for the cause of the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11, but the films, imported between 1905 and 1918 by Sahhafbashi and the Russian businessmen, photographers, and

cinematographers ‘Aqayef and Russi Khan, influenced the rise of that revolutionary movement. Meanwhile, performance of the Western-style operettas and dramas, in line with *taqlid*, expanded during the Constitutional Revolution because of the particular meaning of mass awakening and consciousness-raising associated with them by nationalists and intellectuals. The nationalists and reformists involved were mostly journalists who often used advertisement and public lectures as the most advanced venues for commercial propaganda to promote the value of performance among masses.³⁴²

Both Sepenta and Moradi were involved with several revolutionary movements in distinct ways. Sepenta did not directly participate in the uprising, but he was strongly affected by the events of the Constitutional Revolution. While in high school, Sepenta was involved in theatre, which led him to seriously study the language, culture, and history of ancient Iran. Sepenta also published several newspapers and studied under Din Shah Irani, the leader of the Iranian Zoroastrian immigrants in Bombay. Moradi, on the other hand, was involved with the popular revolutionary *Jangal* (literally means forest) movement in his youth and traveled to Russia after the defeat of the movement.³⁴³ Both Sepenta and Moradi believed that journalists and activists must mobilize the masses in the emancipatory cause of the revolution. Like earlier Iranian reformists Ashtiani, Kirmani, and Talibof, they used the question of woman to articulate the problem of society’s liberation.³⁴⁴ They considered the presence of women in the public spheres of cinema and performing arts such as *zan-e shahri/madani-e emrouzi* as reflecting

³⁴² . Ibid.

³⁴³ . Jamal Omid, *Tarikh-e Sinemay-e Iran, 1279-1358 (The History of Iranian Cinema, 1900-1987)* (Tehran: Entesharat Rawzaneh, 1998); Omid, *Abdoshossein Sepenta (Abdolhossein Sepenta)*.

³⁴⁴ . In nineteenth century Ashtiani, Kermani, and Talibof were influenced by the discourse of Qasim Amin regarding the education of women and the backwardness of the country. Kermani translated Amin’s book. See Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran,” in *Remaking of Women*, ed. Abu-Lughod, 101.

cultural secularization and modernization of the society. Like the new Western-style secular training schools, including The School of Music and the School of Acting, which replaced earlier religious-style *maktab*, both Moradi and Sepenta saw cinema as a secular school for awakening the masses against foreign colonialism as well as for teaching about how the arts, theatre-halls, and the urbanization of the performing arts could bring about the progresses they had seen in Europe. Golnar, a female allegorical image of Iran and her arts is saved, protected, urbanized, and molded in the hands of Ja'far, who in fact is Sepenta himself - a nationalist, a journalist, and an historian, all in one.

In *Haji Aqa Actor Sinema*, when Haji tells Parviz, his future son-in-law, that he cannot let Parvin marry him because he would not be able to face Parviz's father for the shame Parvin has brought to the family by desiring to become a film actress, Parviz not only rejects Haji's traditional approach to Parvin's wishes but also states that "cinema for any nation in the world is the greatest economy, literature, and morality and there is no wrongdoing if we desire to make films in our own country."³⁴⁵ In *Bolhavas*, Nezhat who was forced by her parents to marry Khosraw, a rich man from the city, despite her love for the village boy Ahmad, is the only one who survives at the end of the story and leads a prosperous and happy life with her true lover, Ahmad. The question of woman and her status in family and society related to marriage, love, adultery, and choice for women was an important part of public debates during and after the Constitutional Revolution. Both Parvin and Nezhat had a socio-critical perspective on the question of Iranian woman and on cinema as a school where professional training and learning

³⁴⁵ . Omid, *Tarikh-e Sinemay-e Iran, 1279-1358 (The History of Iranian Cinema, 1900-1987)*, 49.

about progress and modernism can take place. Definitely Sepenta and Moradi could join Sediqeh Dawlatabadi, to add cinema to her call for journalism as a “moving school.”³⁴⁶

Overall, cinema in Iran towards the end of the Qajar dynasty and before 1918, encompassed three functions, entertainment, education, and journalism. The debates mainly addressed the question of the Iranian tradition of *tazhib-e akhlaq* (moral elevation), defending or rejecting certain aspects of *tajadod* (modernity) significant to the formation of Iranian political and cultural spheres. The first article about cinema, which appeared in *Iran-e Naw* (The New Iran) in 1909, addressed the connection between cinema and education by questioning the mission of social projects in the Western world as venues for the institution of modernity and nation-state building. The article suggested that cinema should be used at schools as a significant educational medium; therefore, the ministry of education should obtain the right to film production, importation, and screening. Thus, money would be gained for schools and the domineering foreign companies, uninterested in the appropriateness of foreign films for Iranian society, should be excluded.³⁴⁷ Ayatollah Seyyed Hassan Modarres saw cinema as a means to a certain kind of *tajadod* (modernity) adapted to the new political regime planned for desperate Iran by Western societies. “In the name of foreign novels and fables, which in fact are not any other than our own *hossein kord* stories (an Iranian popular story), Arsen Lopen style moral abuses and corruptions attempt to falsely present the real progresses of Western civilization to

³⁴⁶ . San’ati and Najmabadi, eds., *Sediqeh Dowlatabadi* (*Sediqeh Dowlatabadi*).

³⁴⁷ . Hormoz, “Cinema as the Medium of Civilization,” *Iran Naw* (December 1909).

our youth.” In contrast, Taqi Zadeh, in line with Mirza Malkom Khan believed that “Iran, in body and in soul, in demeanor and in mind must totally follow foreign style.”³⁴⁸

These articles pointed out that in opposition to *taqlid* and like western style theatre, cinema introduced to Iranians between 1909 and 1918 silenced the voice of protest and became a means of entertainment. It used adaptations of Moliere’s plays to promote morals instead of for socio-political criticism, which had originally been advanced by *taqlid*. Iranian silent and talkie feature films produced during 1930s, such as *Haji Aqa Actor Sinema*, *Bolhavas*, and to a certain degree *Dokhtar-e Lor* were influenced by that shift of direction, in particular with their emphasis on the question of woman both on the discursive and the practical level. However, in economic terms, cinema was enmeshed in the political reality of the time. Both Sepenta and Moradi were confronted with many obstacles to their intention to establish a national film company and produce and direct films in Iran. In the process of making *Bolhavas*, Moradi sought collaboration by publishing an article in the *Ettela’at* newspaper, entitled “Cinematography in Iran.” He addressed film making as a great service to society both in terms of financial profit and in the elevation of morality, courage, and nationalist sentiments. As a new cultural medium, he states, cinema could encourage tourism by introducing Iran and her cultural, artistic, and territorial wealth to the world and showcase our scientific progress at home and abroad. He related the need for the establishment of an indigenous film industry to the construction of factories such as sugar, textile, and industrial machinery. He considered the “lack of investment” by Iranians as the cause of previous failures.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ . Tahami Nejad, *Sinemay-e Iran (Iranian Cinema)*, 22-3; Ahmad Kasrawi, *Khaharan wa Dokhtaran-e Ma (Our Sisters and Daughters)* (Koln: Khaneh Ketab Koln, 1998); Ahmad Kasrawi, *Tarikh-e Mashrouteh Iran (The History of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution)* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Amir Kabir, 1957).

³⁴⁹ . Ebrahim Moradi, “Sinematografi dar Iran (Cinematography in Iran) ‘*Ettela’at*’ (1932): 1733.

Moradi's silent film *Bolhavas* was not able to compete financially with the wave of imported talkie films by foreign companies. Screening of *Leyli wa Majnun* in 1936, Sepenta's fifth and last film, in Iran also faced many difficulties, despite his earlier success with *Dokhtar-e Lor*. In his memoir, Sepenta connected the corruption and the censorship by the government to politics, pointing out the artificial development of the capital versus the extreme poverty of provinces. Sepenta, who had worked earlier with the Imperial Film Company of Bombay as the producer of *Dokhtar-e Lor* but had chosen the East India Company in Calcutta for his last film because of a conflict with the former company, now was faced with the Imperial Film Company's total monopoly over the imported film industry in Iran. His dream of establishing a film studio in Iran was never realized during his lifetime.³⁵⁰

While debates began to flourish in the press, advertisements in newspapers about new documentary films, cinema halls in Tehran and other cities, and other entertainment events accompanied the films. By the late 1930s, the mass popularity of cinema in Iran, through imported films, required an increase in screening times, creating tight competition between the owners of cinema halls. Rents were increased and financial conflicts among co-owners sometimes led to the closing of cinema-halls or co-owners splitting up. Overall, the ownership of cinema-halls gained prestige as a new, attractive, and profitable profession. As a result, cinema as a technique improved. Newspapers, initially only reporting news about films, began to include articles and columns introducing the public to the social impact of cinema and demanding new laws and regulations for foreign investments. Three by-laws were issued in 1930, 1935, and 1939, and by 1941 the business became the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice, which introduced the following requirements: 1) written permission issued by the

³⁵⁰ . Omid, *Abdoshossein Sepenta (Abdolhossein Sepenta)*.

Ministry for opening a cinema, 2) a private screening of a film for an official city censor prior to its public screening, 3) total authority by the city official over censorship of immoral scenes, 4) a ban on smoking and eating nuts inside the cinema hall, and 5) prohibition of overselling tickets.³⁵¹

The original copy of *Dokhtar-e Lor* concluded with the scene of Golnar and Ja'far boarding a ship headed for India, after they escaped from the brutal hands of the bandits. Initially, the film did not get a screening permission in Iran because "it did not address socio-political advancements that occurred in the country under the leadership of Reza Shah Pahlavi." Sepenta was told this by government authorities. In a revised copy, Sepenta added another scene at the end showing Golnar and Ja'far inside their living room in India, Ja'far reading *Iran*, a pro-Iranian government paper, while Golnar plays piano. Ja'far is so impressed by the news reported in the paper about the progress and reforms happening in Iran that he tells Golnar that it is time for them to return.³⁵² Civil reforms under the state authority and bureaucratic policies of Reza Shah Pahlavi, who emerged as the leader of Iran in 1925 in a coup d'état which expelled Ahmad Shah and ended the *Qajar* dynasty, promoted the advancement of a national cultural identity based on institutionalization of culture. The new and transformed art of performance, including theatre, music, and cinema represented that space of institutionalization of culture in the form of the establishment of state schools and centers. In 1926, Colonel 'Alinaqi Vaziri, who had studied in Germany and was one of the best players of *tar*, returned to Iran and established the Honarestan-e Musiqi (Artistic School of Music). Vaziri and his troupe organized special programs for women one day a week in this club.

³⁵¹ . Ibid.

³⁵² . Mohammad Tahami Nejad, *Filmnameh Tarikh-e Sinemay-e Iran (The Screenplay of the History of Iranian Cineam)* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Sinema, 1993).

Unlike Nasir al-Din Shah, Reza Shah did not originally welcome the art of performance either in its traditional popular form, such as *ta'zieh* and *taqlid*, or as Western style drama. He ordered the closing down of all the theatre and cinema halls immediately after he took control of the country. He despised the shocking satirical language of *taqlid*, but he tolerated Europe's views on the important role of theatre in the proliferation of nationalist sentiments, education, and progress. He established Teatr-e Madreseh Shahr-dari (the Municipal School of Theatre) in 1936 and Markaz Parvaresh-e Afkar (the Society of Public Guidance) in 1939. Spatial transformation of the performance, which included the emergence of theatre- and movie-halls, establishment of different new forms of art schools, advertisements, and press columns, contributed to the development of the city as well as the urbanization of *namayesh*, which included women's presence in the public sphere of *tamashakhaneh* and cinema. The establishment of Kanoon Banovan-e Iran (The League of Iranian Women) in 1935, headed by Reza Shah's daughter Ashraf Pahlavi, provided legitimate public endorsement for Muslim women to seek professional training in acting in those governmental schools, which appeared during the late 1930s.³⁵³ The emergence of separate educational institutions intended to disintegrate and differentiate the performing arts of theatre, music and cinema, but many women who began their career in cinema like Ruhangiz Sami Nejad (featured as Golnar in *Dokhtar-e Lor*), Fakhrolzaman Jabbar Vaziri, Iran Daftari, and Roqieh Chehrazad (featuring in Sepenta's third film *Shirin wa Farhad*), and Assieh Shari'atmadari (Nezhat in *Bolhavas*), began their work on stage before appearing on the screen. They had contributed to and facilitated the process of conceptualization of the discursive as well as practical definition of *zan-e shahri/madani-e*

³⁵³ . These two schools were founded by the state budget similar to the Teaching Training Colleges under the instructions of Reza Shah. Madreseh Artisti-e Cinema (The Actor School of Cinema), founded in 1930, was a private school but received the seal of approval from the Ministry of the State. See Omid, *Tarikh-e Sinemay-e Iran, 1279-1358 (The History of Iranian Cinema, 1900-1987)*.

emrouzi (the urban/secular “New Woman”) which became the core objective of the Kanoon Banovan-e Iran (The League of Iranian Women), for the future years to come.

Layla, the National Film Industry, and Independence in Egypt

Although cinema arrived in Egypt during the nineteenth century, it took almost half a century for Egypt to embark on the road to producing its first feature films. As Walter Armbrust has argued, similar and quite contemporary to the nation-building mission of the printing press, the rise of “screen capitalism” in Egypt was an experience of “imagined community” building based on the presentation of a “common fund of images of musical and theatrical actors with which the audience was intimately familiar.” According to Armbrust, Egyptian commercial films of the 1940s presented “Egyptian nationalism in the making,” which was simply a combination of artists and performers coming from different ethnic, class, and religious backgrounds. This “synthetic system of communication,” Armbrust has argued, “had no direct connection to the imagery of vernacular culture normally emphasized in the implicit opposition between high literate culture and the ‘authentic’ vernacular culture.”³⁵⁴

To expand Armbrust’s argument further I would like to suggest that the emergence of Egyptian’s first feature films at the end of the 1920s and during the 1930s needs to be viewed in connection with the concept of continuity and change among cinema, theatre, and music as a process of cultural practices of a nation in its formation. The surge of the 1940s commercial films, of course, was a process involving actors and performers from different ethnic, class, and religious backgrounds, whose images were intimately familiar to the mass of audiences, but the rise of the same performing artists as “stars” was also part of shifts occurring in the process of production of culture introduced through the space of performance arts of music, theatre, press,

³⁵⁴ . Armbrust, ed., *Mass Mediation*, 315.

and photography. This process of cultural production was caught up in the socio-political crisis of the interwar period and the residue of both socio-political crisis and cultural production of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several popular forms of performance, such as *khayal al-zill*, *al-muhabbazin*, and *al-karaguz* in the process of their spatial and temporal developments served Egyptians as means to generate construction of various ethnic, class, and religious identities. As a high point of development of these popular forms of performance, and both as a physical and as a virtual space, cinema highlighted the emergence of the new culture of the visual public sphere in Egypt during the interwar period. Construction of gender representing the “New Woman” defined by the concept of *madani* (urban/secular) was a significant part of that spatial transformation and cultural production of the time.

As I discussed in previous chapters, both as discursive and as social definitions, *al-Mara'* *al-Madani al-Jidida* (The Urban/Secular “New Woman”), emerged in conjunction with the appearance of women on the stage of the newly emerged theatre-, music-, and movie-halls under the influence of Egyptian intelligentsia. The discourse of gender, both as a subject and as a social practice, addressed the question of women’s identity as a multi-dimensional entity, moving from the notion of personal gender identity to a broader space of national identity.³⁵⁵ Cinema, incorporating the notion of spatial transformation of the performance, the impact of middle- to upper-class intelligentsia on institutionalization of performance, the project of urban expansion and the city life versus the decadence of rural settings, and female artists’ claim to professionalism of their artistic status with citizen rights played central roles in moving from the notion of personal gender identity to a broader space of national identity.

³⁵⁵ . Sakr, *Women and Media in the Middle East*, 56.

The first Egyptian full-length feature films, such as *Layla* (1927), *Zeynab* (1930), *Awlad al-Dhawāt* (*Sons of Aristocrats*, 1932), *al-Wardā al-Bayda'* (*The White Rose*, 1933/34), *Dumu al-Hubb* (*Tears of Love*), 1935/36), *Widad* (*Goodbye*, 1936), *Yahya al-Hubb* (*Long Live Love*, 1937/38) and *Layla al-Badawiya* (*Layla the Bedouin*, 1937) incorporated women as a metaphor in both their narratives and images. In *Awlad al-Dhawāt* and *al-Wardā al-Bayda'* representations of women addressed the question of social status. These productions of the Egyptian national film industry undermined the dominance of Western imports. In *Layla* and *Layla al-Badawiya* the question of woman embodied urbanism and elevation of city life, promotion of new forms of spatial settings and new genres of performance, and institutionalization of the national film industry through the establishment of educational organizations. Nationalism and questions of national identity were placed at the heart of these films in conjunction with the discursive as well as practical representation of women as embodiment of the idea of the financial and cultural independence of Egypt, at a time when the country was subject to the intense economic and socio-political aggressions of British colonialism. In *al-Ward al-Bayda'*, directed by Muhammad Karim and produced by the well-established theatrical artist Yusuf Wahbi, the white rose assumes metaphorical meaning for the pure love of a poor man for his upper class employer's daughter. Although the man gains a high social status after becoming an acclaimed singer he is not able to overcome his feeling of inferiority deriving from his previous social and economic conditions. Two other films directed by Karim, *Dumu al-Hubb* and *Yahya al-Hubb*, as well as *Awlad al-Dhawāt* directed by Yusuf Wahbi also narrate stories about individuals who fall in love with those above their social ranks.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ . Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema*.

All these films project a sense of instability and identity crisis prevalent among Egyptians of the time. The subject of class struggle, while on one level recalling the social satire of earlier popular plays such as *al-muhabbazin* and *al-karaguz* which mocked the social status of aristocracy, in a broader view was also an indirect reference to the financial hegemony of European and non-native producers over the industry during the early phase of production of films in Egypt. Although Egypt was ahead of other Arab and Middle Eastern countries in establishing a national film production process in the region, that accomplishment still reflected both the financial and the cultural legacies of European colonial domination of Egypt. The “veiled protectorate” of Lord Cromer’s view of “oriental” Egyptians during the late nineteenth century was a mark on the Egyptians psyche.³⁵⁷ In addition, this accomplishment was in a state of constant challenge by the influence of European film production companies. The figure of woman as unattainable represented the struggle that the Egyptian national film industry constantly had to carry on in facing competition from foreign importers, which was ultimately tied to the question of national independence from the British. The arrival of cinema in Egypt as a space for advocating physical and ideological reforms, therefore, had intensified and incorporated that notion.

Cinema arrived in Egypt in 1896 with the screening of the Lumiere brothers’ film in the Tousson stock exchange in Alexandria and *Hamam Schneider* (Schneider Bath) in Cairo. “It became common in Egypt to present films during theatre performances.” The movies shown were produced and directed by Europeans shooting in Arab lands and were used to elevate

³⁵⁷ . For general information about policies and political directions of Lord Cromer in Egypt, see Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*.

Europeans as a superior race.³⁵⁸ This was a time when the British, under the colonial administration of Lord Cromer, prevented the development of any “local industrial base that might offer competition to British textile industry.” Construction of the Aswan Dam, rebuilding of the Delta Barrage, and the opening of another railway line occurred mainly for the growth in plantation of cotton to keep Egypt as an exporter of this product.³⁵⁹ In 1906, the French company Pathe built the first cinema in Cairo, and by 1908 five cinemas had been built in Cairo and Alexandria. The number increased to 80 by 1917 in all of Egypt.³⁶⁰ Even during the late 1930s, foreign companies of another sort were operating in Egypt. For example, in 1934 MGM Hollywood opened MGM Metro Theatre on Soliman Pasha Street on the occasion of the screening of David Selznick’s box office hit, *Gone with the Wind* in the U.S. The company had planned this movie theatre in new Art Deco style in a three-story building, the first in Cairo to use air-conditioning. The company’s offices on the first floor were also in charge of the distribution rights and the promotion of a popular rent-a-movie service.³⁶¹

The screening of films was accompanied by Arabic translations. Initially foreigners owned the first movie theaters and monopolized the production of films in Egypt, but by 1909 Egypt became the first and the only country in the region to “develop a national film industry during the colonial period.” Most of these early films were “news films” about the country and its social and political events, such as the filming in 1908 of the funeral of Mustafa Kamil,

³⁵⁸ . Shafik. *Arab Cinema*, 10.

³⁵⁹ . Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 103.

³⁶⁰ . Shafik, *Arab Cinema*; Husayn Uthman, *Hikayat min Tarikh al-Sinema al-Arabiyya (Stories from the History of Arab Cinema)* (Cairo: ‘Abdin, 1977); Jalal al-Sharqawi, ed., *Risala’ fi Tarikh al-Sinema al-Arabiyya (Writings in the History of Arab Cinema)* (Cairo: Al-Maktaba’ al-Arabiyya, 1970).

³⁶¹ . Samir Rafa’i, *Cairo, the Glory Years: Who Built What, When, Why, and for Whom...* (Alexandria: Harpocrates Publishing, 2003), 33.

pioneering nationalist. By the end of World War I, many Egyptian popular theatre actors and artists were cooperating with Europeans as actors, cameramen, and directors,³⁶² which had enormous impact on the rise of the Egyptian film industry during the interwar period.

Exportation of Egyptian films to other Arab countries of the region also popularized these movies and helped to spread Egyptian dialects there.³⁶³ Half a century earlier Y'aqub Sannu, born in Egypt to a Jewish family of Italian origin, had taken the first step in turning *'amma* (colloquial Egyptian Arabic) into a common means of communication among Arab people in his comic plays. Sannu's dream of establishing a national theatre in Egypt for awakening the conscience of the nation, however, was not realized.³⁶⁴

Not only male directors and actors like Muhammad Karim, 'Ali al-Kassar, and Muhammad Bayyumi took part in this cooperation, but also women such as 'Aziza Amir, Assia Daghir, Fatima Rushdi, Bahiga Hariz, and Ruz al Yusuf joined foreign troupes. These women initially began their careers in performing arts in popular musical concerts and adaptations of European theatre and later became directors, producers, actresses, screenwriters, and music composers themselves. Each made a significant contribution to the founding of an Egyptian national film industry, themselves emerging as celebrities and professional artists who were able to lift up their social class status from poverty to financially successful businesswomen.

The theme of struggle against the challenges of competition and inferiority projected through the image of an unattainable woman ultimately was a question of connecting the problem of the national film industry to the issue of the country's total independence from colonial dominance. That connection was conveyed in many ways. On one level, importation of

³⁶² . Shafik, *Arab Cinema*.

³⁶³ . Arnbrust, *Mass Mediations*.

³⁶⁴ . Barbour, "The Arabic Theatre."

foreign films was bound up with financial dominance of the colonial powers. Egypt fell under a “system of dual control” during Khedive Isma’il’s reign in which the French and British appointed controllers in Egyptian government to supervise the expenditure of Egyptian revenues. Later, the Public Debt Commission was set up as the result of Isma’il’s unpaid loans and bankruptcy. Through the Commission, British and French and other European creditors intervened in the financial affairs of Egypt. This initial economic intervention continued to operate in Egypt until “the age of Nassir.” Despite the British’s attempt to develop the economy and to open high ranking administrative positions to Egyptians, a certain common ground was created between *fellahin* (the peasants) and the urban nationalists in expressing opposition to the presence of the British in the country. The abolishment of the British protectorate rule in Egypt in 1922, in the wake of the revolution of 1919, still did not prevent Britain’s intervention in military and foreign affairs during the interwar period. The struggle by Egyptians to achieve independence continued. In addition, power struggles among competing factions of the elite and the lack of an inspiring leader after the death in 1927 of Sa’d Zaghlul, the leader of the *Wafd* Party and the first Egyptian Prime Minister, caused Egyptians to mistrust their government. Many elite thinkers and politicians believed in the superiority of European rational foundations and secular political institutions, thereby distancing themselves from much of the public. Politicians and elites failed to respond to the economic grievances of Egypt’s urban poor and the recent migrants from the countryside, leaving those responsibilities to private enterprises with nationalistic interests.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁵ . Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamic organization in favor of economic reform in terms of a replacement of foreign capital with local investment, for example took initiative in responding to those nationalist interventions by setting up freelance enterprises such as the weaving, transportation, and construction companies in Cairo. See Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

During the 1920s and 30s, the film industry was empowered through private investors, including artists, producers, and directors. The Egyptian entrepreneurship of Tala't Harb contributed to the building of that infrastructure. Harb founded *Misr Bank* (the Bank of Egypt) and in 1925 turned his attention to cinema by establishing the *Sharikat Misr al-Sinima wa-l-Tamthil* (Cinema and Performance Company of Egypt) for the production of advertising and information films. By the mid-1930s investment grew dramatically through the construction of *Misr Studio* in 1934, which contained a laboratory and sound studio. Harb also employed several European specialists such as German director Fritz Kram and set Designer Robert Scharfenberg. He began the process of sending Egyptian students abroad, providing scholarships to learn the industry.³⁶⁶ By the mid-1930s twelve films were produced by Egyptians. The number increased to twenty-two annually by 1942.³⁶⁷ For the next twenty years, *Studio Misr* dominated production in the film industry and supported the education of many young filmmakers abroad. The liberal government of Sa'd Zaghlul was a promoter of achieving internal sovereignty through a European model of the parliamentary system, which initially was issued in the Proclamation of a Constitution in 1923, despite Zaghlul's absence from the Constitutional Commission. A certain degree of independence opened a space for further legislative executions such as the abolition of the Capitulations law in 1937, and the mandatory Arabic written communications for companies in 1942/43. In 1944, a minimum quota was fixed for Egyptians employed by companies.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ . Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 14.

³⁶⁷ . Armbrust, *Mass Mediations*, 301.

³⁶⁸ . Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 15.

Although Harb's initiative in establishing the *Studio Misr* was *sinima al-muqawalat* (a private entrepreneurship operation), the company opened a path for later formation of the industry as an institute through the establishment of a private film school in 1945 and the Higher Film Institute in 1959. In fact, *Studio Misr* highlighted the process of the institutionalization of performance for a nationalist cause against foreign economic interventions. The same process of urbanization and institutionalization of performance shifted the economic heart of the city from its traditional center of power into new European style neighborhoods with luxurious houses and gardens.

The image of an unattainable woman representing the connection between the problem of formation of a national film industry and the country's independence, on a larger level, conveyed the impact of Western imports on Egyptian culture. Orientalism, as a system of thought as well as a strategy of domination, was used by European and American producers and directors to associate Egypt with backwardness and femininity, and to represent colonial occupations on the screen through manipulation of Egypt's territory for shooting Western heroic and nationalistic films.³⁶⁹ As scholars have argued, nationalism, both within Western and Egyptian textual and visual representations, was gendered.³⁷⁰ In Egypt association of women with the cultural idealization of nationalism was carried out both on ideological and practical levels. Al-Jabarti reported on the daughter of a prominent religious leader, Shaykh al-Bakri. The daughter was killed after the French departure because "she had dressed in the French style and mixed with the

³⁶⁹ . For an analytical study of Orientalism see Edward Sa'id, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

³⁷⁰ . For Western scholarship on this subject see Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann, and Catherine Hall, eds., *Gendered Nations: Nationalism and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: Berg, 2000); Caren Kaplan, Noram Alarcon and Minoo Moallem, eds., *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); For scholarship on nationalism and gender in Egypt See Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*; Selma Botman, *Engendering Citizenship in Egypt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

French.”³⁷¹ On a more contemporary note, Safiyya Zaghlul, the wife of the popular nationalist leader Sa’d Zaghlul, gained a symbolic role both within the nationalist *Wafd* party and among the Egyptian masses. Called *Umm al-Misriyyin* (the Mother of the Egyptians), Safiyya preferred to stay in Egypt instead of accompanying her exiled husband to the Island of Malta because a group of women demonstrators came to her door and chanted “Aisha was the mother of the believers; Safiyya is the mother of the Egyptians.” She projected a male-like image of herself during the period of her involvement with the *Wafd* Party in the absence of her husband’s leadership. She chaired the committee’s meetings, lead a women’s protest, and demanded Egypt’s independence by producing manifestoes.³⁷² In the nineteenth century, the narrative surrounding nationalist struggle associated women with the cultural morality of society.

Pioneers of reformist ideologies such as the Iranian-born Sayyed Jamal al-Din Assadabadi (al-Afghani, 1839-97), Shaykh Muhammed ‘Abduh (1849-1905), and Lutfi Ahmed El-Sayed (born in 1872) had connected the idea of cultural strength with the social status of women. ‘Abduh, for example, believed that “one of the most important sources of the weakness and passivity which had assailed the Arab peoples was the backwardness of women.”³⁷³ The rise of women’s education and the printing press opened a path for women such as Malak Hifni Nassif (1886-1918), May Ziada, Nabawiyyah Musa, Hidiya ‘Afifi (1898-1969), Huda Sha’rawi (1882-1947), Doria Shafiq (1908-75) and Ceza Nabrawi, to participate in the public spheres of writing, education, lecturing, opening literary salons, philanthropy, and politics. Technical

³⁷¹ . Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 45.

³⁷² . Goldschmidt, Jr., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*, 236.

³⁷³ . Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 50; Amira Khawasek, *Mi’arika al-Mar’a al-Misriyya: Lil Khuruj min Asr al-Harim (The Sphere of Egyptian Women: Out of the Seclusion Priod)* (Cairo: Maktaba’ al-Usrah, 2004).

schools and the university gradually opened their doors to women. May Ziyada became the first woman attending university. In 1919, Esther Fahmi Wissa (1895-1990) became the secretary of the New Woman Society and in 1920 vice president of the *Wafdist* Women's Central Committee whose first president was Huda Sha'rawi. As part of the Committee's achievements, in 1920 Fahmi led "a campaign to boycott English merchandise and Milner's Committee, an operation which was strongly supported by Bank Misr and its founder Tala't Harb". In 1928 the first class of girls received their diploma from Shubra Secondary School in Cairo and a year later the first class graduated in the field of Humanities. In 1929, Zainab Kamel Hasan began teaching in the Department of Chemistry at the Faculty of Sciences of the Egyptian University in Cairo after receiving her Diploma from the University of London. The first woman doctor, "Helena Sidaros was appointed in 1930 as resident doctor at Kitchener Hospital in Cairo." In 1933 the first woman was graduated from the university.³⁷⁴

Women also entered the public world of the stage by the early decades of the twentieth century. They held musical concerts, played in musical theatres of comic and melodrama genres, and performed dances on the stage. By the early 1930s a number of these artists achieved fame by managing their own *sala* (nightclubs). Their entrance to the world of cinema came at a remarkable moment of popularity and celebrity as the "stars" of theatre halls and nightclubs. Prominent artist Fatima Rushdi, for example, owned her own theatrical company and worked with her husband 'Aziz 'Id, a producer and artistic director who created the comic character of *al-Rifiyu al-Franco Arab* (Franco-Arab Revue) followed later by Najib al-Rihani and 'Ali al-Kassar. She originally was a member of Ramsis Theatre Company, founded by Yusuf Wahbi. Rushdi produced and acted in many plays and films. She gained fame and popularity by playing

³⁷⁴ . Elsadda and Abu-Ghazi, eds., *Significant Moments in the History*.

a variety of roles on the stage including Najaf, the beggar's daughter in *A Night from the Thousand Nights*, Cleopatra in 'Ahmed Shawqi's *Masra' Kliyopatra* (Cleopatra), Mark Anthony in a translation from Shakespeare, and Tutu, a boy character in a vaudeville. Rushdi gained popularity in the region because of her attempts at portraying foreign characters in a language and attire familiar to the Arab masses. She was also a pioneer in cinema by playing leading roles in films such as *al-Tariq al-Mustaqim* (The Straight Way, 1937), and *al-'Azima* (Departure, 19302).³⁷⁵

The first Egyptian full-length feature film, *Layla*, was produced by 'Aziza Amir in 1927. Amir also starred the movie. Viewed within the perspective of a national identity crisis addressing the significance of the artistic and cultural heritages of Egypt, *Layla* presented a multi-layered argument. On the ideological level, the film presented Egypt in the image of a woman, Layla. The narrative of *Layla* is a story of love, misuse, betrayal, and downfall: "a young village girl, Layla ('Aziza Amir), gives herself to a local Bedouin, Ahmed (Wedad 'Orfi), who then runs off with a foreign tourist, leaving Layla pregnant out of wedlock and vulnerable to the advance of a sleazy older man, Salim (Ahmed Galal)." The anti-colonial discourse of this narrative places Layla as a metaphor for the foundation of a nation, proud of her cultural and artistic heritage from past history, but subject to abuse and betrayal by elites as she struggles with both an internal ideological crisis and the external encroachment of "modernity." The film reflects not only on the impact of the European genre of melodramas and the physical space of theatre halls on the gradual disappearance of Egypt's traditional popular forms of performance; it also reflects the controversial debates among Egypt's urban middle-class intelligentsia and elites about the need for both stylistic as well as physical changes in popular forms of performance that

³⁷⁵ . Balbour, "The Arabic Theatre"; Goldschmidt, Jr., *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*; Fatima Rushdi, *Kifahil fil Masrah wal Sinima (My Struggle in Theatre and Cinema)* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'aref bil Misr, 1971).

is inscribed within its narrative. Ahmed is presented as a Bedouin tour guide who works in the ruins of Egypt's ancient Pharaonic history, the pyramids at *Saqqara*. His running off with a foreign tourist resonates with the passion that certain Egyptian intellectuals and politicians expressed for European reforms in many areas of socio-political affairs. His liminal position, as an interpreter of Egypt's past glorified history in a foreign language not familiar to the Egyptian masses, draws on that notion.

Rifa' al-Tahtawi, for example, lived in Paris from 1826 to 1831 as the representative of Egypt's educational reform and visited many places of entertainment including the Opera Comique, the Franconi Theatre, and le Comte Theatre in that city. On his return to Egypt, he described European theatres in his book *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz (The Purification of Gold in the Summary of Paris)* which later became a school textbook. He wrote:

These theatres (*tiyatrāt*) are in form great houses with a large dome with a number of floors. Each floor has rooms [boxes] (*uwad*) positioned around the dome inside. On one side of the house is a broad stage (*maq'ad*), looked down upon from all these boxes, so that all that happens on it is seen by anyone inside the house [auditorium]... They make that stage as the play (*la'ba*) requires... When they are preparing the stage they lower the curtain (*sitara*) to prevent the audience (*hadirin*) from seeing, then they raise it and begin the play... The performance is at night, and begins with musical instruments. The play is advertised in a bill (*waraqā*), posted on the walls of the city, and written about in the daily newspapers (*tadhakir yawmiya*).³⁷⁶

Egyptian writer, educatorial administrator, and minister of culture, Taha Husayn, believed in “reshaping” of Egypt's “cultural identity” through emphasizing its ancient connection with Greeks and the Mediterranean heritage, which excluded its Islamic tradition. His book *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafah fi Misr* (The Future of Culture in Egypt) addresses the Pharaonic glory of the Nile river and its major contribution to the rise of Greek civilization and its aftermath in

³⁷⁶ . Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 34-5; Husayn Fouzi al-Najjar, ed., *Rifa' al-Tahtawi: Ra'ed Fikr wa Imam Nahda (Rifa' al-Tahtawi: Pioneer in Thought and Movement)* (Cairo: Al-Hi'at al-Misriyya al-'Ama al-Kitab, 1987).

Western Europe. Taha Husayn was educated at the Sorbonne.³⁷⁷ Mirrored in the image of the Bedouin tour guide Ahmed, these intellectuals embodied a mixed portrayal of problems including controversies, identity crisis, and dislocation.

Although the arrival of Europeans, beginning with French occupation in 1798, began spatial transformation of performance art in Egypt, many forms of popular entertainment as variations from the pre-Napoleonic era continued to survive and compete with the European form of theatre, expanded by French and Italians in Egypt. For centuries, al-Uzbakiyya with its diverse residential quarter, cafes and restaurants, streets and marketplaces, and lake and gardens remained as the main center of public entertainment activities, including boating, listening to Arab poets and storytellers, and watching various forms of performances. People from diverse ethnic, class, and religious backgrounds including beys, pashas, peasants, Copts, Muslims, and Arab immigrants from Syria and Turkey attended these performances. In 1805 Muhammad Ali built a palace there and in 1813 he celebrated his son Isma'il Pasha's wedding and his daughter's wedding in there.³⁷⁸

During the late nineteenth century, many traditional and popular types of entertainers appeared to perform on the scene, such as *mughazlikin* (street singers), *hababziya* (actors), acrobat performers, and *baramika* (male and female dancers). Farce performances, *khyal al-zil*, *awlad raiya* (puppet and mime shows), *al-muhabbazin*, and *al-karaguz* continued to take place because of their popularity. The place hosted many groups of people with diverse class, religion, and ethnic backgrounds. Stories told in these performances were improvised and included

³⁷⁷ . Nabil Faraj, *Taha Husayn: Wathaeq Adabiyya (Taha Husayn: Literary Culture)* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1951); Taha Husayn, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqafah fi Misr (The Future of Culture in Egypt)*, trans. Sidney Glazer (New York: Octagon Books, 1975 [c1954]).

³⁷⁸ . Sadgrove., *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 13.

mockery of social, political, and familial conditions. The number of performances increased, especially during the month of Ramadan, after the dawn, by adding *al-muwalid al-nabawi* and other *muwalid* (birthdays of saints). Various tents, booths, and pavilions were built to house the attendees, who at times could reach 2-3,000 individuals just for the performance of *al-karaguz*. A narrow stage was also erected for the performance of puppet shows. A circular area full of tents which contained booths lit with candles was also formed on the occasions of the celebration of *al-muwalid al-nabawi*. Performances of *al-karaguz* and Arab orchestras were held on these occasions. Despite the fact that Muhammad Ali, Khedive Ismail, and Khedive Abbas II attended many of these performances, which were welcomed by the Egyptian masses with applause and laughter, most Europeans, a number of members of the Ottoman ruling class, and educated elites disapproved of them.³⁷⁹

The first European style cafes and restaurants appeared in al-Uzbakiyya after the arrival of the French. Sala Santi was one of the first music halls opened there in the early twentieth century.³⁸⁰ By the mid nineteenth century (1860s), construction of different theatre-halls such as Zizinia, Vittorio Alfieri, Rossini, and Vittorio Emmunele in Alexandria and the Comedie, Opera and the Theatre-Concert of al-Uzbakiyya established European-style theatre as a semi-professional business. Café-concerts were also formed. Various forms of performance including operettas, comedies, farces and vaudevilles were performed in these places. The newly transformed performance spaces also elicited the 1847 government rule requiring disciplined behavior inside the theatre-halls. The audience was required to remain silent and express their reactions to the plays only through limited applause. Purchasing tickets and wearing appropriate

³⁷⁹ . Ibid.; Murshid, "The Modern Theatre in Egypt with Special Reference to Melodrama, (1789-1956),"

³⁸⁰ . Danielson, "Artists and Entrepreneurs," 295.

outfits were necessary to attend these plays. Advertisement in journals was used and written programs were distributed among the audience before the performance began. Smoking, whistling, cane banging, and foot stamping were forbidden. Actors were expected to be respectful to their audience, avoiding words or deeds, disrespectful to the viewers. Eight policemen were “stationed in the vicinity of the theatre to intervene by the order of the Minister of Police.”³⁸¹

In 1869 on the occasion of the opening of the Suez Canal, an important trading route between London and Bombay, Khedive Isma'il (1863-79) ordered the construction of the first state theatre, the Cairo Opera House, which hosted many European singers and performers of the time. To entertain European royalties and guests, Khedive Isma'il had asked the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi to compose the opera *Aida* for the occasion of the Opera House's opening celebrations.³⁸² The late nineteenth century's spatial transformation of the performance from street corners and squares to the European-style theatre-halls and opera-houses had an enormous impact on turning performance into a matter of private entities. It also eliminated the close interaction between the artist and the audience. While establishment of the Cairo Opera House was the milestone of the Egyptian government's support for European operas and dramas, Khedive Ismail also sponsored a number of Egyptian musicians as court artists to elevate their status and show his admiration for Egyptian music.³⁸³ Control by the government suppressed various forms of improvisatory satire, replacing it with operas. The government's high

³⁸¹ . Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century (1799-1882)*, 171.

³⁸² . Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*.

³⁸³ . Racy, “Musica Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932,” 46.

expenditure on European-style operas was not met with proper audience support. The ticket sales did not cover the expenses.³⁸⁴

Many female artists also performed in these theatre-halls. For example, early theatres held programs containing adaptations of European-style plays of Moliere, and a *mutrib* 'ala *takht*, often a female vocalist, sang during the interval.³⁸⁵ In nightclubs, the program included serving food and drinks and an entertainment skit, which featured a second-rate dancer followed by the performance of a female star, usually a singer, as the highlight of the program. In fact, on a practical level, *Layla* presents the process of change in the status of women performers from the nineteenth century private setting singers, 'awalim, and street- and coffeehouse-performers, *ghawazi*, to women like Munira al-Mahdiyya, Fathiyya Ahmed, Umm Kulthum, Badia' Masabni, Leyla Murad, Fatima Rushdi, and Bahija Hafiz, who held musical concerts or performed theatrical plays in the twentieth century.

'Aziza Amir, the producer and the main actress of *Layla*, along with other female producers and actresses such as Fatima Rushdi, Victoria Musa, and Bahija Hafiz, began her public performances in these halls. They took part in musical theatres both/either as singers or actresses in many Egyptian or European play adaptations such as *Anthony and Cleopatra* (played by Fatima Rushdi), *Ghaniyat al-Andalus* (*The Music of Andalusia*, played by Victoria Musa), and *Salah al-Din* (played by Munira al-Mahdiyya). The iconic image of Layla as a country girl, despite many changes brought to her figure, registers the dislocation of traditional forms of popular performance through the changing status of 'awalim and *ghawazi*. With the arrival of Napoleon in Egypt 'awalim left Cairo to protest the French occupation. Napoleon promoted

³⁸⁴ . Shafik, *Arab Cinema*.

³⁸⁵ . Mitchell, A., *Women of Egypt, 1924-1931*.

women's performances in public festivities such as *muwalids* to make them accessible to French soldiers.

Increase in the number of Europeans after Napoleon's departure made the question of accessibility of women as entertainers problematic. In 1834, for example, Muhammed 'Ali issued an edict forbidding female performers to dance publicly in Cairo. The edict aimed to stop female dancers from performing in front of foreigners but ultimately it caused dislocation of many women entertainers, including *'awalim*, who in fact were not subject to this edict. Moved to the south of Egypt, heavy taxes and demand for women dancers there banished the distinction between *'awalim* and *ghawazi*. When Khedive Isma'il, on the occasion of the opening of Suez Canal in 1869, lifted the ban, the number of women dancers who came back to Cairo from Upper Egypt doubled as the result of the impoverished status of many women entertainers who were drawn to the business of dancing after the 1834 ban. Regulatory restrictions were increased after the 1882 British occupation, which brought in many British officials and soldiers. By the early twentieth century, the celebration of saint's days was limited, while religious spectacles and many forms of public performances were banned. Meanwhile, café-chantants and theatre and music halls had women singers and dancers who had previously performed on streets and in front of the coffeehouses. Al-Uzbekiyya lake, the place of the earliest display of traditional popular forms of performance, and its garden with a playhouse built by Muhammad 'Ali for the pleasure of Europeans became the main site for the construction of nightclubs and theatre-halls.³⁸⁶

The spatial transformation of performance was a part of the project of urbanization of Cairo during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which also included the

³⁸⁶ . van Nieuwkerk, "‘A Trade Like Any Other’."

foundation of many educational institutions such as the establishment of a technical and vocational school, Dar al-Ulum (the House of Science) in 1872 and the reopening of the School of Language in 1868 by the order of Khedive Isma'il. In 1898 the National Bank of Egypt was inaugurated and in 1902 a new Antiquities Museum was opened by the order of Khedive Abbas Hilmi II. A number of new department stores, hotels, cafes, museums, and markets opened during the first decade of the twentieth century. Boulaq Bridge, the second bridge connecting downtown to Ghezira Island, was built in 1905. The same year, Garden City, "one of Cairo's most signature neighborhoods filled with elegant villas and curving streets" was formed.³⁸⁷ In 1908, Khedive Abbas Hilmi authorized the opening of the private Egyptian University. By the 1920s and 30s the number of night clubs, theatre- and music-halls, and movie theatres increased and expanded to the Rud al-Faraj neighborhood on the banks of the Nile. The artistic level of many female performers who worked in these *sala* was high despite the bad reputation of the nightclubs.³⁸⁸

Normally, European tourists frequented theatre halls, whereas local Egyptian people enjoyed attending nightclubs. Publicity for nightclub performers also appeared in newspapers and art magazines.³⁸⁹ Pro-Western elites also invited "nightclub entertainers to perform at their weddings."³⁹⁰ Many women such as Badi'a Masabni, Insaf and Ratiba Rushdi, Meri Mansur, and Munira al-Mahdiyya later opened their own *sala*. By the mid 1920s, these women were in demand for exclusive contracts with such rival recording companies such as *Odeon*,

³⁸⁷ . Rafa't, *Cairo, the Glory Years*, 89.

³⁸⁸ . van Nieuwkerk, "'A Trade Like Any Other'," 43.

³⁸⁹ . Mitchell, A., *Women of Egypt, 1924-1931*.

³⁹⁰ . van Nieuwkerk, "'A Trade Like Any Other'," 49.

Gramophone, and *Baidaphon*. Their elevation to the status of professional artists enjoying financial security, which removed them from their original working class status, marked them as celebrities despite the society's disapproval of female artists and their numerous marriages, divorces, and unconventional lifestyles. Nightclubs were banished at the beginning of the 1930s as the result of economic crisis and the rise of nationalist Islamic movements such as the *Ikhwan al-Muslimin*. Moral sanctions against female performers included the 1923 *fatwa* by religious leaders against "all indecent and immoral nightclubs" for producing "vulgar songs without obtaining permission from the Printing Office."³⁹¹ Those *'awalim* who did not follow the footsteps of these celebrities were engaged in the entertainment business of organizing dances and singing for wedding and family festivities of the lower classes.³⁹² They quartered in Muhammad 'Ali Street, a low-brow center for instrument makers, music instructors, and entertainment clusters. A few, like Bamba Kashshar and Amina il-Sirrafiyya, continued to enjoy the privilege of being invited by provincial upper class pashas in the tradition of earlier "special occasions like *sahrah* (evening social gathering) held normally during a *farah* (wedding festivity)."³⁹³

Layla included many scenes from the streets of Cairo, which on one level promoted the emergence of urban life and its appreciation by middle- and upper-class elites through the spectacle of a culture of *al-jadida*, including theatre and music halls. However, through the image of Layla, a girl from the countryside, and a series of interactions taking place between the countryside and the city, the film also conveys the elevation of an urban life with a rural accent,

³⁹¹ . Mitchell, A., *Women of Egypt, 1924-1931*, 4-5.

³⁹² . Zuhur, ed., *Images of Enchantment*, 267.

³⁹³ . Racy, "Musical Change and Commercial Recordings in Egypt, 1904-1932," 49.

preserving certain elements of Egyptian traditional popular forms of performance as an anti-thesis to European cultural values that certain intellectuals and politicians so dearly were attempting to impose on the masses. The most characteristic presentation of girls from the countryside was a female dancer in rural or folkloric attire. It appeared in a number of 1930s films, such as *Layla al-Badawiya* (*Layla the Bedouin*) and *Layla Bint al-Balad* (*Layla the Daughter of the Country*). She was often portrayed as a “seduced girl, the repudiated wife, or the poor woman looking for a way of earning an honest living.”³⁹⁴ Although in later movies the idea of a female dancer resonated more with the fallen, seductive, and dependent woman, during the 1930s the appearance of *bint al-balad* type dancers in film was a mixed adaptation of the belly dancer image presented at nightclubs. Belly dancing became popular among Europeans and Egyptian elites as a form of *raqs sharqi* (Eastern, or Oriental dance) which was transformed, both in its style and its dress, after its performance at the 1894 Chicago World Fair Exposition in order to be more pleasant for a European taste. *Raq s sharqi* was said to be a cabaret version of the Egyptian solo dance known as *raqs baladi*, having its origin in “Bedouin culture, and cross-cultural influences flowing through the Ottoman Empire.”³⁹⁵ ‘*Awalim*, performing dance in private settings and *ghawazi*, dancing in public seem to have been influenced by this Bedouin culture and form of performance.

The most prominent artist who was associated with *raqs sharqi* was Badi’a Masabni, a Syrian born singer and dancer who met the pioneer in Egyptian comedy, Najib al-Rihani in the 1920s and worked in his troupe as a comic actress. She married al-Rihani in 1924 but got divorced two years later and opened her own *sala*, *Kasino Badi’a Masabni* in ‘Imad al-Din

³⁹⁴ . Zuhur, *Images of Enchantment*, 267; Mahmoud Qasim, *Al-Mar’a fil Sinima* (*Women in Cinema*) (Cairo: Dar al-Amin, 1998).

³⁹⁵ . Ibid., p. 6.

Street. She gained popularity and fame by hosting both Oriental and Western performances and her own dancing and singing the *munulugat* (monologues). She created, in particular, a series of innovations in the area of *raqs sharqi*, adding new movements to this female solo dance and including Arabic dialects in her singing style which she had learned through a numerous trips she had taken throughout Maghreb and Mashreq. Badi'a also was a pioneer in holding a women-only Tuesday matinee show, beginning in 1928.³⁹⁶ In 1936, she produced and starred in the film *Malikat al-Masrah* (*The Queen of the Theatre*) in which she introduced belly dancing for the first time on the screen. Similar movies later followed.³⁹⁷ The image of the female dancer in *bint al-baladi* attire was a carry-over from the earlier popular form of performance. It was a reflection of Masabni's presentation of belly dancing out of *raqs sharqi*, connecting the past with the future, similar to building the link between the countryside and the city through cinema, a futuristic medium molded by the middle class intelligentsia.

The popularity of the film relying on the image of *bint al-balad* also guaranteed its financial success and challenged the dominance of foreign imports. The nationalist agenda conveyed through the image of the female dancer in fact seems to have felt at home with 'Aziza Amir. 'Aziza could perfectly see herself as the embodiment of that symbolic heroic figure for the cause of Egypt's national independence through the creation of a national film industry. Performing as a singer and dancer in *casinos* during 1920s, 'Aziza had already shown her talent for appropriating aspects of one of the most popular forms of traditional performances in Egypt, while being open to stylistic changes of the 1920s under the influence of foreign arts. Her career as a poverty stricken woman rising to a position of wealth and fame, and her distinctive choice in

³⁹⁶ . Dougherty, "Badi'a Masabni, Artiste and Modernist," 250-1.

³⁹⁷ Zuhur, *Images of Enchantment*, 266-7.

the selection of her professional name, ‘Aziza Amir (the Ruler’s Favorite one), placed her at a unique junction between elite and popular tastes. Like a number of other female producers and actresses, such as Badia’ Masabni, Bahija Hafiz, Fatima Rushdi, and Umm Kulthum, Amira was aware of the power of the stage as a space for the rise of consciousness among women. As with the feminist spectacle of upper class political pioneers such as Huda Sha’rawi, Doria Shafiq, and Saiza Nabarawi, and in the face of the backlash they had received from male political leaders, the cultural and artistic professionalism of ‘Aziza may be seen as the rise of a form of female public sphere inspired by the power of imagination and visual representations for the formation of a future national independence.

The inclusion of the scenes from the streets of Cairo in theatre-halls and nightclubs, hotels, restaurants, shops, gardens, and parks invited the public to leisure and entertainment activities but at the same time their association with an imagined national identity may have invoked historical memories of the street demonstration of women for the cause of the 1919 Egyptian Revolution. This cosmopolitan aspect of the metropole slowly invited the public to view the formation of the nation through the spaces of performance ranging from politics to culture, with cinema playing a major role. Symbolizing the nation as a woman, and revitalizing the spaces of performance with a feminist anti-colonial consciousness aware of the cultural and artistic traditions of the land, *Layla* was an attempt to celebrate the emergence of an Egyptian national film industry. In contrast to the traditional foundation of theatre and music, it was the futuristic aspect of cinema, in both nationalist and feminist terms, which was instrumental. This inclusive imagery formation of gender and nationalist personifications was certainly depicted in

‘Aziza’s statement, “I have one daughter and that is Egyptian cinema.”³⁹⁸ This anticipated the space of cinema as an acceptable professional field for *al-mar’a al-madani al-jidida* (the urban/secular new woman) of Egypt. ‘Aziza’s accomplishment as a woman pioneer in laying the foundation for the emergence of a national film industry was probably not approved by Tala’t Harb, who two decades earlier had argued against women’s emancipation and entry to the labor force because it could have threatened an increase in competition for professional jobs, although he had favored Qasim Amin’s support of education of women for the advancement of the Egyptian nation. The public emergence of a number of female directors, actresses, and producers during the 1930s and 40s was a testimony to Amir’s challenges to Egypt’s earlier prescription of spectatorship. It was about what bell hooks has called “desiring the right to gaze” during a time when “looking and gazing for women was about contestation.”³⁹⁹

³⁹⁸ . Kay Dickinson, “‘I Have One Daughter and That Is Egyptian Cinema’: ‘Aziza Amir amid the Histories and Geographies of National Allegory,” *Camera Obscura* 22 (2007): 137-77; Tawfiq, *Qisat al-Sinima fil Misr (The Story of Cinema in Egypt)*.

³⁹⁹ . bell hooks, “‘The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators’,” in *Contested Culture: The Image, the Voice, and the Law*, ed. Jane Gaines (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991): 307-20.



Figure 21: A Scene from Iranian Film *Dokhtar-e Lor* (*The Daughter of Lor*), 1930s (Omid, Jamal, Abdolhossein Sepenta: *Zendegi wa Sinema* (Abdolhossein Sepenta: *Life and Cinema*): 41).

نمایش‌های پس از اسلام = ۱۲۵



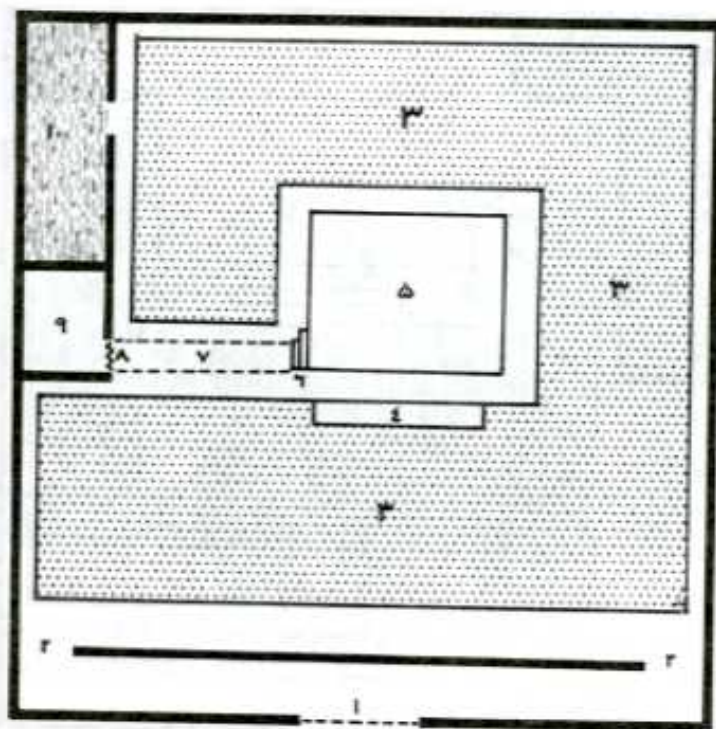
تکیه‌ی دولت پس از اجرای یک نمایش در ۱۲۶۹ شمسی
[از کتاب: یادداشت‌هایی از زندگی خصوصی ناصرالدین‌شاه]

Figure 22: *Tekiy-e Dowlat* after a *Ta'zieh* Performance, Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (Beyzai', Bahram, *Namayesh dar Iran (Performance in Iran)*: 125).



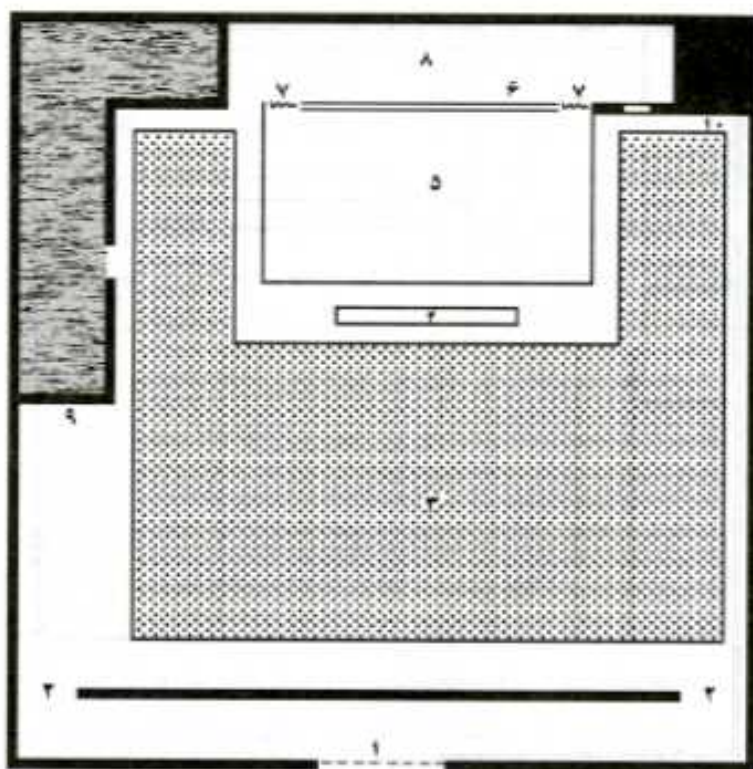
تکیه‌ی دولت، یک نقاشی از کمال‌الملک [محمود در موزه‌ی کاخ گلستان]
 ماهنامه ناصرا ۱۳۲۲

Figure 23: *Tegy-e Dowlat*, A Painting by Kamal al-Molk (Beyzai', Bahram, *Namayesh dar Iran* (Performance in Iran): 122).



- نقشه‌ی تقریبی تیارت علی‌بگ در آغاز کار
- ۱- در ورود ۲- مدخل‌ها ۳- جای تماشاگران ۴- جای نوازندگان
 - ۵- تخت بازی ۶- پلکان ۷- راه آمد و رفت بازیگران از بین
 - جماعت به صورتخانه یا تخت بازی ۸- پرده‌ی جلوی رخت‌کن ۹- رخت‌کن
 - یا صورتخانه ۱۰- آیدارخانه که جای و قلیان به تماشاگران می‌داد.

Figure 24: Original Design of *Teatr-e Ali Beg* (*Theatre of Ali Beg*), 1922 (Beyzai', Bahram, *Namayesh dar Iran* (*Performance in Iran*): 175).



نقشه‌ی تقریبی تیارت علی بگ در دوره‌ی مؤید.

۱- در ورود ۲- مدخل‌ها ۳- جای تماشاگران ۴- جای نوازندگان ۵- صحنه
۶- دورنما ۷- درهای طرفین برای ورود و خروج بازیگران ۸- رخت‌کن یا
صورتخانه ۹- آبدارخانه ۱۰- آتیار

Figure 25: Modified Design of *Teatr-e Ali Beg* (*Ali Beg Theatre*) in Mid 1920s (Beyzai', Bahram, *Namayesh dar Iran* (*Performance in Iran*): 176).



Figure 26: Last Scene from Iranian Film *Dokhtar-e Lor* (*The Daughter of Lor*), 1930s (Omid, Jamal, Abdolhossein Spenta: *Zendegi wa Sinema* (Abdolhossein Sepenta: *Life and Cinema*): 147).



Figure 27: Fakhrol Zaman Jabbar Vaziri in *Leyli wa Majnoun* (*Layla and Majnoun*), 1930s (Omid, Jamal, *Abdolhowwin Sepenta: Zendegi wa Sinema* (Abdolhossein Sepenta: *Life and Cinema*): 77).



Figure 28: A Pictorial Advertisement for the Film “*Shajarat al-Dur*, the First Islamic Queen” (*Ruz al-Yusuf*, 369 (1934/35): 48).

عودة شجرة الدر
الى سينما الكونزمو بالقاهرة
ابتداء من ٢٥ ابريل والايام التالية

شجرة الدر

الفلم الذي يحتوي على أجمل المناظر التاريخية، وأقوى المواقف التمثيلية والذي يعود بك سبعة سنة الى الوراء فتحيا مع أمراء المماليك وفرسان مصر الفاتحية وتشاهد حروبهم ومؤامراتهم وغرامياتهم، والذي تحيا فيه مع جوار القصر ومقنساته ونسمع منهن أبدع الاناشيد واجمل الالحان، والذي تحيا فيه مع الملكة

« شجرة الدر » أول ملكة في الاسلام
تمثيل آسيا . ماري كويني . عبد الرحمن رشدي
عطا الله محائيل . مختار حسين . حسين فوزي . والمطربة مفيدة احمد

إخراج احمد جلال

كل يوم ثلاث حفلات الساعة ٣ ونصف ٦ ونصف ٩ ونصف
يوم الجمعة والاحد حفلة نهار الساعة ١٠ ونصف ، بالبحر

Figure 29: An Advertisement for the Film “*Shajarat al-Dur*, the First Islamic Queen” (*Ruz al-Yusuf*, 369 (1934/35): 51).

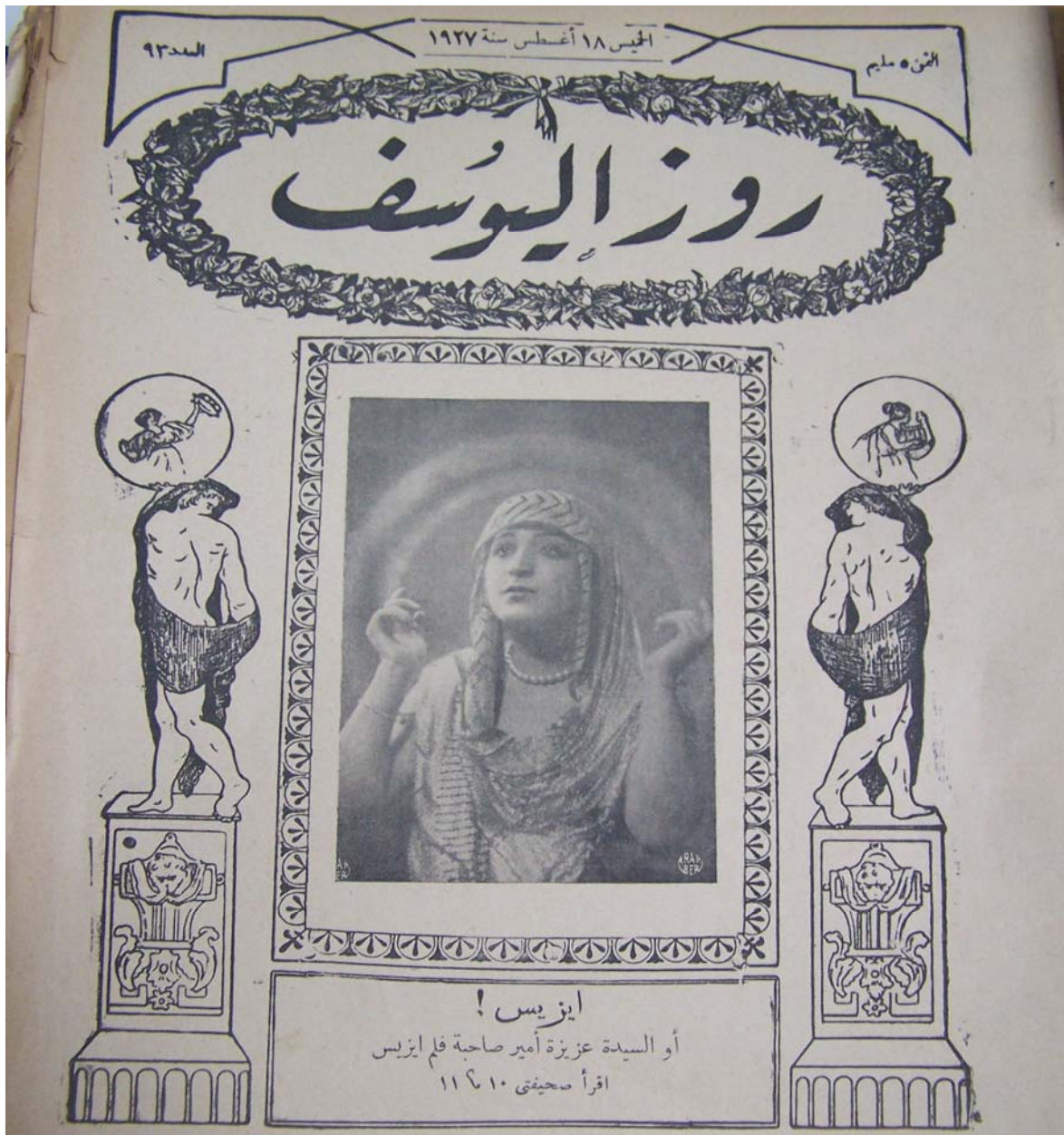


Figure 30. 'Aziza Amir on the Cover of *Ruz al-Yusuf* Playing the Role of Isis (*Ruz al-Yusuf*, 93 (August 1927)).

فيلم ايزيس

يتشرف بان يقدم لجمهور الاسكندرية الكريم

« في سينما تيانرو محمد علي »

ابتداء من يوم الجمعة ١٠ فبراير والايام التالية

الرواية التي لاقت في القاهرة نجاحا باهرا

((ليلى))

درامة مصرية عصرية ذات ٦ فصول

وهي أول رواية سينمائية مصرية اخرجتها سيدة مصرية بممثلات

وممثلين مصريين



Figure 31: An Advertisement for Films *Isis* and *Layla*, both Produced and Played by 'Aziza Amir (*Ruz al-Yusuf*, 113 (1927): ?).



Figure 32: Scenes from *Layla* with 'Aziza Amir, "the First Egyptian Woman Working in the Profession of Cinema" (*Ruz al-Yusuf*, (13 October 1927): 14).



Figure 33: Scenes from *Layla* Featuring 'Aziza Amir, Stifan Rusti, Mary Mansour, and Bamba Kashshar (*Ruz al-Yusuf*, 106 (1927/28?): 24; 113 (October 1927): 14).



Figure 34: Scenes from the Film *Layla* (*Ruz al-Yusuf*, 106 (1927/28?): 24)



Figure 35: 'Aziza Amir, the Producer of the Egyptian Feature Film *Layla* Joined by Ahmed Bek al-Sharii', Istifan Rusti (the Joint Director), and Maestro Geronbirg Selecting Songs for the Film (*Ruz al-Yusuf* 106 (1927/28): 26).



Figure 36: 'Aziza Amir Featured on the Cover of *Ruz al Yusuf* 104 (1927/28).

فرقة بديع مصابني

كارنو بديع بشار عماد الدين تليفون ٤٥٣١٤

تقدم أكبر برنامج فني لأول مرة في مقدمته

اسكتش الهنود الحمر

أكبر استعراض لأول مرة في عالم المسرح

تأليف أبو السعود الأياري تلحين عزت الجاهلي

عروس اسبور

اسكتش فكاهي ذو مواقف وفصول فكاهية جداً

تأليف الاستاذ أمين صدق تلحين الاستاذ عزت الجاهلي

فرقة هاريسون الهندغارية

تشارك في جميع البرامج ملكة الرشاقة الفنانة

السيدة بديعة مصابني



الثلاثاء ماتينية للسيدات والجمعة والاحد

للعموم الساعة ٦ مساءً

07/13/20

Figure 37: An Advertisement for Badi'a Masabni's Casino with its Featuring Several Plays and Special Tuesday Matinee Show for Women (*Ruz al-Yusuf* 313 (February 1934): 19).

Conclusion

Over the course of this dissertation, I presented the argument that the mainstream meaning of “nationalism” in Iran and Egypt needs to be dislocated from its political domain, associated with the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11 and the Egyptian Revolution of 1919. I argued that the formation of national identity and the visible expression of “nationalist” collective subjectivities in interwar Egypt and Iran were also a process of cultural transformation in the aftermath of such a critically engaged period of socio-political endeavors. During the interwar period, cultural identity, associated with *tajadod/al-jidida* (modernity) and the notion of modern life in its local and regional forms, conveyed nationalist aspirations. The world-traveling image and practice of *Zan-e Emrouzi Shahri/al-Mar’a al-Jidida al-Madani* (the Urban/Secular “New Woman”) represented a local “cultural identity crisis” of the period.

The dynamics of the process were sustained through the rise of a visual public sphere of performance art, in its covert medium of journalism and the overt world of the performing arts of music, plays, and cinema. On the discursive level, the emergence of women artists in performing arts associated the image of the “New Woman” with *asl/al-asala* (cultural authenticity) in terms of building connections between *sonnat/al-sunna* (tradition) and the global and international trends of modernism. In Iran, holding public concerts and singing *tasnif* and in Egypt, popularizing *taqtuqa* and becoming the solo vocalist in a *takht* ensemble were means to building that connection. Within this context of continuity and change, the image and practice of the “New Woman” were established to present the link between pre-nineteenth century popular forms of performing arts and artistic genres, forms, and social experiences in the space of the performing arts of the interwar period.

The emergence of cinema in the 1930s addressed the notion of “cultural identity in crisis” within the context of nationalist aspirations. The spectacle of women associated with national independence and as an anti-colonial force against the financial dominance of Europeans in and over the country obtained particular meanings. In Iran, the *shahri/madani* context associated with women served the process of the foundation of a modern nation-state by Reza Shah Pahlavi, elevating a culture of the city and urban development. Cinema presented the foundation of a modern state in parallel with the process of the creation of the image of the “New Woman” on the screen. In Egypt, *al-mar’a al-jidida al-madani* mirrored the process of a secular form of urban development based on the presence and growth of the European populations in the country. On the one hand, the image of an “unattainable woman” in cinema depicted the continuous struggle of Egyptians in gaining political and economic independence from Britain. On the other hand, the appearance of a series of interactions between countryside and the city drew upon the representation of the Egyptian traditional figure of *bint al-balad* (the country girl), presenting cinema and modern advances in film productions with a traditional accent as an antithesis to European cultural values in order to connect the past history of Egypt to its future. As the traditional space of popular forms of performing arts, like street corners and squares, was replaced by the newly emerged theatre- and movie-halls located in middle and upper-class neighborhoods, space also gained social meanings in representing cultural and national identity formation both in Iran and Egypt.

On the practical level, the public appearance of women on the performance stage was subject to both subversive and conformist drives. In Iran, institutionalization of the performing arts through the establishment of art schools, training institutions, and women’s centers confined women’s creative talents within the framework of the modern state policies of Reza Shah. The

nationalist poems sung by women solo vocalists on the stage of concert-halls, and images of woman appearing on the screens of the first Iranian feature films representing the nation mirrored the upholding of “male guardianship.” In Egypt, the national independence aspirations of the middle- and upper-class Egyptian intellectuals and entrepreneurs in founding a secular modern state were also reflected through the establishment of art schools and training institutions. Unlike Iran, however, the lack of an authoritarian modern state and the long experience of occupation by foreigners left the performance space open to the growth of women’s deliberate and multifaceted anti-colonial maneuvering tied to the question of the cultural identity crisis. This was best manifested through the appearance of women-owned art journals, *salas*, and film studios.

As an agent of change, however, the visual public sphere of performance art served women to convey their nationalist aspirations in their own cultural terms. Women journalists explored the world of the press, not only for “self-transformation” but also for its power to let them see and be seen by each other. In Egypt, this was particularly the case with art journals and columns, which addressed the personal and professional lives of Egyptian women on and off the stage. By perpetuating the traditional role of creating interactions between artists and the audience, using improvisation and storytelling, and emphasizing music as the heart of a society’s culture and art, women artists were able to create a sense of imagined identity for themselves as women and individual artists, as well as among the masses, during a critical time in the nationalist lives of these two countries. Diverse forms of public artistic and cultural activities by women during the interwar period included the emergence of a culture of body performance, pertaining to psychological and physical embodiment of the self as an artist – writer, singer, actor – (and as a woman) and the need to fulfill that desire despite the period’s prescriptive

gendered ideology. As a “disruptive act” the medium of performance art marked the emergence of a female visual public sphere working within and against the hegemonic public sphere constituted by the male modernists. Moving from a personal to a national identity sphere, these women were able to articulate a feminine (and in today’s perspective a feminist) interpretation of cultural authenticity through performance art. Women writers and artists used the occasion to claim the space of cultural authenticity of the visual sphere of performance as their right to establish these professions as legitimate and acceptable careers for themselves and for future generations of women.

Crossing from the examination of editorial positions of women in the press to their artistic activities as actresses and producers in cinema, this dissertation has attempted to explore the history of the emergence of both discourse and practice of the “New Woman” in the visual public sphere of performance art during the interwar Iran and Egypt. The project examined cultural transformations at a very engaged period of socio-political activities in Egypt and Iran, addressing the questions of nationalism, national identity formation, and self-transformation. The mediums of journalism and performing arts of music, plays, and cinema provided a space for women to re-envision *tajaddod/al-jidida* (modernity) by refining concepts such as the “tradition,” “public space of the city,” and “self-image.” The *shahri/madani* (urban/civil) context in which the concept of the “New Woman” was discussed and operated sustained the entrance of numerous women to these professions as their rights to citizenship and to be treated as collective subjects. It was the developmental process, rather than a complete and fixed notion, of the history of the emergence of the “New Woman” that this project intended to highlight.

The developmental aspect of the “New Woman” in-the-making was definitely similar both in Egypt and Iran. However, the socio-political contexts in which this process took place

created distinctive characteristics for each. In Iran, European influences, both in performance art as well as in culture, came through indirect contacts by intellectuals and elites on their numerous trips to Europe. Although Christian missionaries entered Iran during the late nineteenth century, the streets of major cities like Tehran during the 1920s and 30s were not a place for intermixing between Iranians and Europeans. Although his Western allies had coached him in many ways and in many areas, Reza Shah was interested in modernization of Iran through the use of his own power. His ideological ambition to turn Iran into an advanced country economically, politically, and culturally parallel to Europe had given his government a paternalistic form and content with mandatory orders and restrictive regulations, such as the mandatory decree of unveiling women and massive mobilization in girls' and female teacher training schools. Under Reza Shah, women's activities in performance art were framed within the state's social service policies. In fact, it was after his departure in 1940 and later in the 1950s and 60s during his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's, reign that women's use of the public sphere of performance lost the earlier governmental prescriptions and limitations. The number of women working in these professions increased. Some gained international fame and celebrity, and others lived and died unknown. Under Mohammad Reza's reign, the question of "cultural authenticity" through performance art was translated into appropriation of the cultural manifestations of Western performing arts, as Iran was integrated within the exclusive circle of modern nations who were given the mission to build "the great civilization." The perpetuation of such cultural assimilation was not only pursued by Iranian intellectuals but also extended among the masses. The 1979 Revolution which brought Islamists in power again limited women's use of the visual public sphere, including prohibiting women from singing in public, mandating *hijab* for women actresses who

appear on the public screen of films, and banning a number of women's journals because of their intention to spread liberal ideologies among Iranian women.

In Egypt, the process of the emergence of the "New Woman" went through different socio-political developments. During the interwar period, unlike Iran, the presence and growth of Europeans in Egypt and their continuous building of theatre-halls and bringing on to the stage European forms of dramas and operas was instrumental in opening spaces for women in the performance art. In the tradition of Khedive Isma'il, King Fuad and his son Faruq supported and provided an open environment for European artistic and cultural interventions. As a result, Egyptian women in large numbers were recruited and showed interest in the field of performance art. As intellectuals and upper middle class Egyptians changed their taste from Ottoman style popular performances to European dramas and operas, women's public presence on the stage symbolized the shift in terms of class preference for artistic tastes. That was manifested through women's artistic activities during this period, which were full of diversity in styles and the forms of artistic genres on the stage. The rise of the nationalist government of Jamal aAbdel Nassir to power limited the use of the public sphere of performance art for women. Badi'a Masabni's *sala* was burned in Cairo's fire in January 1952, which also marked the decline in the pioneering activities of Egyptian women in the field. The interwar female performer who continued to gain fame and popularity under Nassir was Umm Kulthum who in her songs elevated Nassir's Egyptian nationalist cause and independence. In the aftermath of Nassir's defeat and the rise of Anwar Sadat in 1970 and later Mubarak in the 1980s to the present, women's use of the public sphere of performance was directed toward the path of assimilation and appropriation of a foreign culture, producing confusion, dislocation, and discontinuity, like the direction taken under Mohammad Reza Shah in Iran. This dissertation intends to create a space within Middle

Eastern scholarship for further comparative studies of the history of Iran and Egypt through the exploration of the emergence of both the discourse and the practice of the “New Woman” in the public sphere of performance art during the decades in the aftermath of the interwar period. It intends to connect the comparative methodology of a cross-historical and cross-thematical approach to the question of local “modernity,” cultural nationalism, and identity, within the context of a regional history and its encounter with global historical trends.

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Appendix: Translations of Two Songs Performed by Qamar and Munira

***Twilight Bird*, Lyrics by Mirzadeh Eshqi, Performed by Qamar al-Molouk Vaziri, 1926**

Promising bird, cry out, refresh my sorrow with the sparks of your sound, break down and turn this cage into a chaos.

Come out of the cage, you nightingale with captive wings. Sing the song of emancipation of human kind. Blow chaos to these peoples' lands, with a stroke of your breath.

Despotism of the tyrant, cruelty of the oppressor, has destroyed my home. Oh God, oh world, oh nature, bring twilight to our dark nights. It is springtime, flowers are blooming, I am weeping. This cage like my heart is dark and full of nostalgia.

There is no promise, no truth. Sincerity, kindness, and love are fables. The promise and honesty all are disappeared. For the sake of corruption, the causes of homeland and religion are justified.

My face is covered with tears. The repression of the landowners, the tyranny of the masters, the peasant has become restless by carrying sorrow.

***Bassara Berragi*, Lyrics by Sayyid Darwish, Performed by Munira al-Mahdiyya, 1920**

I can see your sign, I can tell your luck.

I have good news young girl about your future. I am able to see your luck and your family's luck, if you have religious issues, family matters, or various problems all about luck.

I can see your sign, I can tell your luck.

If your words are true, young girl, you are an Arabian sweet girl, you Munira al-Mahdiyya, appear to be Egyptian! I am Munira al-Mahdiyya, I have lots of love for my country and its liberation.

I can see your sign, I can tell your luck.

This is the way I carry on life. May God, give them greatness, to obey the family, and this is your destiny my daughter, and the highpoint of luck.

I can see your sign, I can tell your luck.